# JASMIN

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JASMIN

# JASMIN

## BARBER, POET, PHILANTHROPIST.

By SAMUEL SMILES, LL.D.,

AUTHOR OF "LIVES OF THE ENGINEERS," "SELF-HELP," ETC.

"Il rasait bien, il chantait mieux. . . . Si la France possédait dix poètes comme Jasmin, dix poètes de cette influence, elle n'aurait pas à craindre de révolutions."—SAINTE-BEUVE.

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Jacques Jasmin

# PREFACE.

My attention was first called to the works of the poet Jasmin by the eulogistic articles which appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, by De Mazade, Nodier, Villemain, and other well-known reviewers.

I afterwards read the articles by Sainte-Beuve, perhaps the finest critic of French literature, on the life and history of Jasmin, in his 'Portraits Contemporains' as well as his admirable article on the same subject, in the 'Causeries du Lundi.'

While Jasmin was still alive, a translation was published by the American poet Longfellow, of 'The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé,' perhaps the best of Jasmin's poems. In his note to the translation, Longfellow said that "Jasmin, the author of this beautiful poem, is to the South of France what Burns is to the South of Scotland, the representative of the heart of the people; one of those happy bards who are born with their mouths full of birds (*la bouco pleno d'aouvelous*). He has written his own biography in a poetic form, and the simple narrative of his poverty, his struggles, and his triumphs, is very touching. He still lives at Agen, on

the Garonne; and long may he live there to delight his native land with native songs."

I had some difficulty in obtaining Jasmin's poems; but at length I received them from his native town of Agen. They consisted of four volumes octavo, though they were still incomplete. But a new edition has since been published, in 1889, which was heralded by an interesting article in the Paris *Figaro*.

While at Royat, in 1888, I went across the country to Agen, the town in which Jasmin was born, lived, and died. I saw the little room in which he was born, the banks of the Garonne which sounded so sweetly in his ears, the heights of the Ermitage where he played when a boy, the Petite Seminaire in which he was partly educated, the coiffeur's shop in which he carried on his business as a barber and hair-dresser, and finally his tomb in the cemetery where he was buried with all the honours that his towns-fellows could bestow upon him.

From Agen I went south to Toulouse, where I saw the large room in the Museum in which Jasmin first recited his poem of 'Franconnette'; and the hall in the Capitol, where the poet was hailed as The Troubadour, and enrolled member of the Academy of Jeux Floraux—perhaps the crowning event of his life.

In the Appendix to this memoir I have endeavoured to give translations from some of Jasmin's poems. Longfellow's translation of 'The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé' has not been given, as it has already been pub-

lished in his poems, which are in nearly every library. In those which have been given, I have in certain cases taken advantage of the translations by Miss Costello, Miss Preston (of Boston, U.S.), and the Reverend Mr. Craig, D.D., for some time Rector of Kinsale, Ireland.

It is, however, very difficult to translate French poetry into English. The languages, especially the Gascon, are very unlike French as well as English. Hence Villemain remarks, that "every translation must virtually be a new creation." But, such as they are, I have endeavoured to translate the poems as literally as possible. Jasmin's poetry is rather wordy, and requires condensation, though it is admirably suited for recitation. When other persons recited his poems, they were not successful; but when Jasmin recited, or rather acted them, they were always received with enthusiasm.

There was a special feature in Jasmin's life which was altogether unique. This was the part which he played in the South of France as a philanthropist. Where famine or hunger made its appearance amongst the poor people—where a crèche, or orphanage, or school, or even a church, had to be helped and supported—Jasmin was usually called upon to assist with his recitations. He travelled thousands of miles for such purposes, during which he collected about half a million of francs, and gave the whole of this hard-earned money over to the public charities, reserving nothing for

himself except the gratitude of the poor and needy. And after his long journeyings were over, he quietly returned to pursue his humble occupation at Agen. Perhaps there is nothing like this in the history of poetry or literature. For this reason, the character of the man as a philanthropist is even more to be esteemed than his character as a poet and a song-writer.

The author requests the indulgence of the reader with respect to the translations of certain poems given in the Appendix. The memoir of Jasmin must speak for itself.

LONDON, *Nov.* 1891.

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# JASMIN.

## CHAPTER I.

### AGEN.—JASMIN'S BOYHOOD.

AGEN is an important town in the South of France, situated on the right bank of the Garonne, about eighty miles above Bordeaux. The country to the south of Agen contains some of the most fertile land in France. The wide valley is covered with vineyards, orchards, fruit gardens, and corn-fields.

The best panoramic view of Agen and the surrounding country is to be seen from the rocky heights on the northern side of the town. A holy hermit had once occupied a cell on the ascending cliffs; and near it the Convent of the Hermitage has since been erected. Far underneath are seen the red-roofed houses of the town, and beyond them the green promenade of the Gravier.

From the summit of the cliffs the view extends to

a great distance along the wide valley of the Garonne, covered with woods, vineyards, and greenery. The spires of village churches peep up here and there amongst the trees; and in the far distance, on a clear day, are seen the snow-capped peaks of the Pyrenees.

Three bridges connect Agen with the country to the west of the Garonne—the bridge for ordinary traffic, a light and elegant suspension bridge, and a bridge of twenty-three arches which carries the lateral canal to the other side of the river.

The town of Agen itself is not particularly attractive. The old streets are narrow and tortuous, paved with pointed stones; but a fine broad street—the Rue de la République—has recently been erected through the heart of the old town, which greatly adds to the attractions of the place. At one end of this street an ideal statue of the Republic has been erected, and at the other end a life-like bronze statue of the famous poet Jasmin.

This statue to Jasmin is the only one in the town erected to an individual. Yet many distinguished persons have belonged to Agen and the neighbourhood who have not been commemorated in any form. Amongst these were Bernard Palissy, the famous potter*; Joseph J. Scaliger, the great scholar and

* It is stated in the *Bibliographie Générale de l'Agenais*, that Palissy was born in the district of Agen, perhaps at La Chapelle Biron, and that, being a Huguenot, he was imprisoned in the Bastille at Paris, and died there in 1590, shortly after the

philologist; and three distinguished naturalists, Boudon de Saint-Aman, Bory de Saint-Vincent, and the Count de Lacépède.

The bronze statue of Jasmin stands in one of the finest sites in Agen, at one end of the Rue de la République, and nearly opposite the little shop in which he carried on his humble trade of a barber and hairdresser. It represents the poet standing, with his right arm and hand extended, as if in the act of recitation.

How the fame of Jasmin came to be commemorated by a statue erected in his native town by public subscription, will be found related in the following pages. He has told the story of his early life in a bright, natural, and touching style, in one of his best poems, entitled, "My Recollections" (*Mes Souvenirs*), written in Gascon; wherein he revealed his own character with perfect frankness, and at the same time with exquisite sensibility.

Several of Jasmin's works have been translated into English, especially his "Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé," by Longfellow and Lady Georgina Fullerton. The elegant translation by Longfellow is so well known that it is unnecessary to repeat it in the appendix to this volume. But a few other translations of Jasmin's

massacre of St. Bartholomew. But Palissy seems to have been born in another town, not far from La Chapelle Biron. *The Times* of the 7th July, 1891, contained the following paragraph:—"A statue of Bernard Palissy was unveiled yesterday at Villeneuve-sur-Lot, his native town, by M. Bourgeois, Minister of Education."

works have been given, to enable the reader to form some idea of his poetical powers.

Although Jasmin's recitations of his poems were invariably received with enthusiastic applause by his quick-spirited audiences in the South of France, the story of his life will perhaps be found more attractive to English readers than any rendering of his poems, however accurate, into a language different from his own. For poetry, more than all forms of literature, loses most by translation—especially from Gascon into English. Villemain, one of the best of critics, says: "Toute traduction en vers est une autre création que l'original."

We proceed to give an account—mostly from his own *Souvenirs*—of the early life and boyhood of Jasmin. The eighteenth century, old, decrepit, and vicious, was about to come to an end, when in the corner of a little room haunted by rats, a child, the subject of this story, was born. It was on the morning of Shrove Tuesday, the 6th of March, 1798,—just as the day had flung aside its black night-cap, and the morning sun was about to shed its rays upon the earth,—that this son of a crippled mother and a humpbacked tailor first saw the light. The child was born in a house situated in one of the old streets of Agen—15 Rue Fonde-Raché—not far from the shop on the Gravier where Jasmin afterwards carried on the trade of a barber and hair-dresser.

"When a prince is born," said Jasmin in his *Sou-*

*venirs*, "his entrance into the world is saluted with rounds of cannon, but when I, the son of a poor tailor, made my appearance, I was not saluted even with the sound of a popgun." Yet Jasmin was afterwards to become a king of hearts! A Charivari was, however, going on in front of a neighbour's door, as a nuptial serenade on the occasion of some unsuitable marriage; when the clamour of horns and kettles, marrow-bones and cleavers, saluted the mother's ears, accompanied by thirty burlesque verses, the composition of the father of the child who had just been born.

Jacques Jasmin was only one child amongst many. The parents had considerable difficulty in providing for the wants of the family, in food as well as clothing. Besides the father's small earnings as a tailor of the lowest standing, the mother occasionally earned a little money as a laundress. A grandfather, Boé, formed one of the family group. He had been a soldier, but was now too old to serve in the ranks, though France was waging war in Italy and Austria under her new Emperor. Boé, however, helped to earn the family living by begging with his wallet from door to door.

Jasmin describes the dwelling in which this poor family lived. It was miserably furnished. The winds blew in at every corner. There were three ragged beds; a cupboard, containing a few bits of broken plates; a stone bottle; two jugs of cracked earthenware; a wooden cup broken at the edges; a rusty candlestick, used

when candles were available; a small half-black looking-glass without a frame, held against the wall by three little nails; four broken chairs; a closet without a key; old Boé's suspended wallet; a tailor's board, with clippings of stuff and patched-up garments; such were the contents of the house, the family consisting in all of nine persons.

It is well that poor children know comparatively little of their miserable bringings-up. They have no opportunity of contrasting their life and belongings with those of other children more richly nurtured. The infant Jasmin slept no less soundly in his little cot stuffed with larks' feathers than if he had been laid on a bed of down. Then he was nourished by his mother's milk, and he grew, though somewhat lean and angular, as fast as any king's son. He began to toddle about, and made acquaintances with the neighbours' children.

After a few years had passed, Jasmin, being a spirited fellow, was allowed to accompany his father at night in the concerts of rough music. He placed a long paper cap on his head, like a French clown, and with a horn in his hand he made as much noise, and played as many antics, as any fool in the crowd. Though the tailor could not read, he usually composed the verses for the Charivari; and the doggerel of the father, mysteriously fructified, afterwards became the seed of poetry in the son.

The performance of the Charivari was common at

that time in the South of France. When an old man proposed to marry a maiden less than half his age, or when an elderly widow proposed to marry a man much younger than herself, or when anything of a heterogeneous kind occurred in any proposed union, a terrible row began. The populace assembled in the evening of the day on which the banns had been first proclaimed, and saluted the happy pair in their respective houses with a Charivari. Bells, horns, pokers and tongs, marrow-bones and cleavers, or any thing that would make a noise, was brought into requisition, and the noise thus made, accompanied with howling recitations of the Charivari, made the night positively hideous.

The riot went on for several evenings; and when the wedding-day arrived, the Charivarists, with the same noise and violence, entered the church with the marriage guests; and at night they besieged the house of the happy pair, throwing into their windows stones, brickbats, and every kind of missile. Such was their honeymoon!

This barbarous custom has now fallen entirely into disuse. If attempted to be renewed, it is summarily put down by the police, though it still exists among the Basques as a Toberac. It may also be mentioned that a similar practice once prevailed in Devonshire —described by the Rev. S. Baring Gould in his "Red Spider." It was there known as the Hare Hunt, or Skimmity-riding.

The tailor's Charivaris brought him in no money.

They did not increase his business; in fact, they made him many enemies. His uncouth rhymes did not increase his mending of old clothes. However sharp his needle might be, his children's teeth were still sharper; and often they had little enough to eat. The maintenance of the family mainly depended on the mother, and the wallet of grandfather Boé.

The mother, poor though she was, had a heart of gold under her serge gown. She washed and mended indefatigably. When she had finished her washing, the children, so soon as they could walk, accompanied her to the willows along the banks of the Garonne, where the clothes were hung out to dry. There they had at least the benefit of breathing fresh and pure air.

Grandfather Boé was a venerable old fellow. He amused the children at night with his stories of military life—

> "Wept o'er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,
> Shouldered his crutch, and showed how fields were won."

During the day he carried his wallet from door to door in Agen, or amongst the farmhouses in the neighbourhood; and when he came home at eve he emptied his wallet and divided the spoil amongst the family. If he obtained, during his day's journey, some more succulent morsel than another, he bestowed it upon his grandson Jacques, whom he loved most dearly.

Like all healthy boys, young Jasmin's chief delight was in the sunshine and the open air. He also enjoyed the pleasures of fellowship and the happiness of living. Rich and poor, old and young, share in this glorified gladness. Jasmin had as yet known no sorrow. His companions were poor boys like himself. They had never known any other condition.

Just as the noontide bells began to ring, Jasmin set out with a hunch of bread in his hand—perhaps taken from his grandfather's wallet—to enjoy the afternoon with his comrades. Without cap or shoes he sped away. The sun was often genial, and he never bethought him of cold. On the company went, some twenty or thirty in number, to gather willow faggots by the banks of the Garonne.

"Oh, how my soul leapt!" he exclaimed in his *Souvenirs*, "when we all set out together at mid-day, singing 'The Lamb whom Thou hast given me,' a well-known carol in the south. The very recollection of that pleasure even now enchants me. 'To the Island—to the Island!' shouted the boldest, and then we made haste to wade to the Island, each to gather together our little bundle of fagots."

The rest of the vagrants' time was spent in play. They ascended the cliff towards the grotto of Saint John. They shared in many a contest. They dared each other to do things—possible and impossible. There were climbings of rocks, and daring leaps, with many perils and escapades, according to the nature of

boys at play. At length, after becoming tired, there was the return home an hour before nightfall. And now the little fellows tripped along; thirty fagot bundles were carried on thirty heads; and the thirty sang, as on setting out, the same carol, with the same refrain.

Jasmin proceeds, in his *Souvenirs*, to describe with great zest and a wonderful richness of local colour, the impromptu fêtes in which he bore a part; his raids upon the cherry and plum orchards—for the neighbourhood of Agen is rich in plum-trees, and prunes are one of the principal articles of commerce in the district. Playing at soldiers was one of Jasmin's favourite amusements; and he was usually elected Captain.

"I should need," he says, "a hundred trumpets to celebrate all my victories." Then he describes the dancing round the bonfires, and the fantastic ceremonies connected with the celebration of St. John's Eve.

Agen is celebrated for its fairs. In the month of June, one of the most important fairs in the South of France is held on the extensive promenade in front of the Gravier. There Jasmin went to pick up any spare sous by holding horses or cattle, or running errands, or performing any trifling commission for the farmers or graziers. When he had filled to a slight extent his little purse, he went home at night and emptied the whole contents into his mother's hand. His heart often sank as she received his earnings with

smiles and tears. "Poor child," she would say, "your help comes just in time." Thus the bitter thought of poverty and the evidences of destitution were always near at hand.

In the autumn Jasmin went gleaning in the corn-fields, for it was his greatest pleasure to bring home some additional help for the family needs. In September came the vintage—the gathering in and pressing of the grapes previous to their manufacture into wine. The boy was able, with his handy helpfulness, to add a little more money to the home store. Winter followed, and the weather became colder. In the dearth of firewood, Jasmin was fain to preserve his bodily heat, notwithstanding his ragged clothes, by warming himself by the sun in some sheltered nook so long as the day lasted; or he would play with his companions, being still buoyed up with the joy and vigour of youth.

When the stern winter set in, Jasmin spent his evenings in the company of spinning-women and children, principally for the sake of warmth. A score or more of women, with their children, assembled in a large room, lighted by a single antique lamp suspended from the ceiling. The women had distaffs and heavy spindles, by means of which they spun a kind of coarse pack-thread, which the children wound up, sitting on stools at their feet. All the while some old dame would relate the old-world ogreish stories of Blue Beard, the Sorcerer, or the Loup Garou, to fascinate the

ears and trouble the dreams of the young folks. It was here, no doubt, that Jasmin gathered much of the traditionary lore which he afterwards wove into his poetical ballads.

Jasmin had his moments of sadness. He was now getting a big fellow, and his mother was anxious that he should receive some little education. He had not yet been taught to read; he had not even learnt his A B C. The word *school* frightened him. He could not bear to be shut up in a close room—he who had been accustomed to enjoy a sort of vagabond life in the open air. He could not give up his comrades, his playing at soldiers, and his numerous escapades.

The mother, during the hum of her spinning-wheel, often spoke in whispers to grandfather Boé of her desire to send the boy to school. When Jasmin overheard their conversation, he could scarcely conceal his tears. Old Boé determined to do what he could. He scraped together his little savings, and handed them over to the mother. But the money could not then be used for educating Jasmin; it was sorely needed for buying bread. Thus the matter lay over for a time.

The old man became unable to go out of doors to solicit alms. Age and infirmity kept him indoors. He began to feel himself a burden on the impoverished family. He made up his mind to rid them of the incumbrance, and desired the parents to put him into the family arm-chair and have him carried to the

hospital. Jasmin has touchingly told the incident of his removal.

"It happened on a Monday," he says in his *Souvenirs:* "I was then ten years old. I was playing in the square with my companions, girded about with a wooden sword, and I was king; but suddenly a dreadful spectacle disturbed my royalty. I saw an old man in an arm-chair borne along by several persons. The bearers approached still nearer, when I recognised my afflicted grandfather. 'O God,' said I, 'what do I see? My old grandfather surrounded by my family.' In my grief I saw only him. I ran up to him in tears, threw myself on his neck and kissed him.

"In returning my embrace, he wept. 'O grandfather,' said I, 'where are you going? Why do you weep? Why are you leaving our home?' 'My child,' said the old man, 'I am going to the hospital,* *where all the Jasmins die.*' He again embraced me, closed his eyes, and was carried away. We followed him for some time under the trees. I abandoned my play, and returned home full of sorrow."

Grandfather Boé did not survive long in the hospital. He was utterly worn out. After five days the old man quietly breathed his last. His wallet was hung up on its usual nail in his former home, but it was never used

* *L'hôpital* means an infirmary or almshouse for old and impoverished people.

again. One of the bread-winners had departed, and the family were poorer than ever.

"On that Monday," says Jasmin, "I for the first time knew and felt that we were very poor."

All this is told with marvellous effect in the first part of the *Souvenirs*, which ends with a wail and a sob.

## CHAPTER II.

### JASMIN AT SCHOOL.

One joyful day Jasmin's mother came home in an ecstasy of delight, and cried, "To school, my child, to school!" "To school?" said Jasmin, greatly amazed. "How is this? Have we grown rich?" "No, my poor boy, but you will get your schooling for nothing. Your cousin has promised to educate you; come, come, I am so happy!" It was Sister Boé, the schoolmistress of Agen, who had offered to teach the boy gratuitously the elements of reading and writing.

The news of Jacques' proposed scholarship caused no small stir at home. The mother was almost beside herself with joy. The father too was equally moved, and shed tears of gratitude. He believed that the boy might yet be able to help him in writing out, under his dictation, the Charivari impromptus which, he supposed, were his chief forte. Indeed, the whole family regarded this great stroke of luck for Jacques in the light of a special providence, and as the beginning of a brilliant destiny. The mother, in order to dress him properly, rummaged the house, and picked out the least mended suit of clothes, in which to array the young scholar

When properly clothed, the boy, not without fear on his own part, was taken by his mother to school.

Behold him, then, placed under the tuition of Sister Boé! There were some fifty other children at school, mumbling at the letters of the alphabet, and trying to read their first easy sentences. Jasmin had a good memory, and soon mastered the difficulties of the A B C. "'Twixt smiles and tears," he says, "I soon learnt to read, by the help of the pious Sister."

In six months he was able to enter the Seminary in the Rue Montesquieu as a free scholar. He now served at Mass. Having a good ear for music, he became a chorister, and sang the *Tantum ergo*. He was a diligent boy, and so far everything prospered well with him. He even received a prize. True, it was only an old cassock, dry as autumn heather. But, being trimmed up by his father, it served to hide his ragged clothes beneath.

His mother was very proud of the cassock. "Thank God," she said, "thou learnest well; and this is the reason why, each Tuesday, a white loaf comes from the Seminary. It is always welcome, for the sake of the hungry little ones." "Yes," he replied, "I will try my best to be learned for your sake." But Jasmin did not long wear the cassock. He was shortly after turned out of the Seminary, in consequence of a naughty trick which he played upon a girl of the household.

Jasmin tells the story of his expulsion with great

frankness, though evidently ashamed of the transaction. He was passing through the inner court one day, during the Shrove Carnival, when, looking up, he caught sight of a petticoat. He stopped and gazed. A strange tremor crept through his nerves. What evil spirit possessed him to approach the owner of the petticoat? He looked up again, and recognised the sweet and rosy-cheeked Catherine—the housemaid of the Seminary. She was perched near the top of a slim ladder leaning against the wall, standing upright, and feeding the feathery-footed pigeons.

A vision flashed through Jasmin's mind—"a life all velvet," as he expressed it,—and he approached the ladder. He climbed up a few steps, and what did he see? Two comely ankles and two pretty little feet. His heart burned within him, and he breathed a loud sigh. The girl heard the sigh, looked down, and huddled up the ladder, crying piteously. The ladder was too slim to bear two. It snapped and fell, and they tumbled down, she above and he below!

The loud screams of the girl brought all the household to the spot—the Canons, the little Abbé, the cook, the scullion—indeed all the inmates of the Seminary. Jasmin quaintly remarks, "A girl always likes to have the sins known that she has caused others to commit." But in this case, according to Jasmin's own showing, the girl was not to blame. The trick which he played might be very innocent, but to the assembled household it seemed very wicked. He must be punished!

First, he had a terrible wigging from the master; and next, he was sentenced to imprisonment during the rest of the Carnival.

In default of a dungeon, they locked him in a dismal little chamber, with some bread and water. Next day, Shrove Tuesday, while the Carnival was afoot, Jasmin felt very angry and very hungry. "Who sleeps eats," says the proverb. "But," said Jasmin, "the proverb lies: I did not sleep, and was consumed by hunger." Then he filled up the measure of his iniquity by breaking into a cupboard!

It happened that the Convent preserves were kept in the room wherein he was confined. Their odour attracted him, and he climbed up, by means of a table and chair, to the closet in which they were stored. He found a splendid pot of preserves. He opened it; and though he had no spoon, he used his fingers and soon emptied the pot. What a delicious treat he enjoyed—enough to make him forget the pleasures of the Carnival.

Jasmin was about to replace the empty pot, when he heard the click-clack of a door behind him. He looked round, and saw the Superior, who had unlocked the door, and come to restore the boy to liberty. Oh, unhappy day! When the Abbé found the prisoner stealing his precious preserves, he became furious. "What! plundering my sweetmeats?" he cried. "Come down, sirrah, come down! no pardon for you now." He pulled Jasmin from his chair and table, and the empty jar fell

broken at his feet. "Get out, get out of this house, thou imp of hell!" And taking Jasmin by the scruff of the neck, he thrust him violently out of the door and into the street.

But worse was yet to come. When the expelled scholar reached the street, his face and mouth were smeared with jam. He was like a blackamoor. Some urchins who encountered him on his homeward route, surmised that his disguise was intended as a masque for the Carnival. He ran, and they pursued him. The mob of boys increased, and he ran the faster. At last he reached his father's door, and rushed in, half dead with pain, hunger, and thirst. The family were all there—father, mother, and children.

They were surprised and astonished at his sudden entrance. After kissing them all round, he proceeded to relate his adventures at the Seminary. He could not tell them all, but he told enough. His narrative was received with dead silence. But he was thirsty and hungry. He saw a pot of kidney-bean porridge hanging over the fire, and said he would like to allay his hunger by participating in their meal. But alas! The whole of it had been consumed. The pot was empty, and yet the children were not satisfied with their dinner. "Now I know," said the mother, "why no white bread has come from the Seminary." Jasmin was now greatly distressed. "Accursed sweetmeats," he thought. "Oh! what a wretch I am to have caused so much misery and distress."

The children had eaten only a few vegetables; and now there was another mouth to fill. The fire had almost expired for want of fuel. The children had no bread that day, for the Seminary loaf had not arrived. What were they now to do? The mother suffered cruel tortures in not being able to give her children bread, especially on the home-coming of her favourite scapegrace.

At last, after glancing at her left hand, she rose suddenly. She exclaimed in a cheerful voice, "Wait patiently until my return." She put her Sunday kerchief on her head, and departed. In a short time she returned, to the delight of the children, with a loaf of bread under her arm. They laughed and sang, and prepared to enjoy their feast, though it was only of bread. The mother apparently joined in their cheerfulness, though a sad pain gnawed at her heart. Jasmin saw his mother hide her hand; but when it was necessary for her to cut the loaf, after making the cross according to custom, he saw that the ring on her left hand had disappeared. "Holy Cross," he thought, "it is true that she has sold her wedding-ring to buy bread for her children."

This was a sad beginning of life for the poor boy. He was now another burden on the family. Old Boé had gone, and could no longer help him with his savoury morsels. He was so oppressed with grief, that he could no longer play with his comrades as before. But Providence again came to his aid. The good Abbé

Miraben heard the story of his expulsion from the Seminary. Though a boy may be tricky he cannot be perfect, and the priest had much compassion on him. Knowing Jasmin's abilities, and the poverty of his parents, the Abbé used his influence to obtain an admission for him to one of the town's schools, where he was again enabled to carry on his education.

The good Abbé was helpful to the boy in many ways. One evening, when Jasmin was on his way to the Augustins to read and recite to the Sisters, he was waylaid by a troop of his old playfellows. They wished him to accompany them to the old rendezvous in the square; but he refused, because he had a previous engagement. The boys then began to hustle him, and proceeded to tear off his tattered clothes. He could only bend his head before his assailants, but never said a word.

At length his good friend Miraben came up and rescued him. He drove away the boys, and said to Jasmin, "Little one, don't breathe a word; your mother knows nothing. They won't torment you long! Take up thy clothes," he said. "Come, poverty is not a crime. *Courage!* Thou art even rich. Thou hast an angel on high watching over thee. Console thyself, brave child, and nothing more will happen to vex thee."

The encouragement of the Abbé proved prophetic. No more troubles of this kind afflicted the boy.

The aged priest looked after the well-being of himself and family. He sent them bread from time to time, and kept the wolf from their door. Meanwhile Jasmin did what he could to help them at home. During the vintage time he was well employed; and also at fair times. He was a helpful boy, and was always willing to oblige friends and neighbours.

But the time arrived when he must come to some determination as to his future calling in life. He was averse to being a tailor, seeing the sad results of his father's trade at home. After consultation with his mother, he resolved on becoming a barber and hair-dresser. Very little capital was required for carrying on that trade; only razors, combs, and scissors.

Long after, when Jasmin was a comparatively thriving man, he said: "Yes, I have eaten the bread of charity; most of my ancestors died at the hospital; my mother pledged her nuptial ring to buy a loaf of bread. All this shows how much misery we had to endure, the frightful picture of which I have placed in the light of day in my *Souvenirs*. But I am afraid of wearying the public, as I do not wish to be accused of aiming too much at contrasts. For when we are happy, perfectly happy, there is nothing further from what I am, and what I have been, as to make me fear for any such misconstruction on the part of my hearers."

## CHAPTER III.

### BARBER AND HAIRDRESSER.

JASMIN was sixteen years old when he was apprenticed to a barber and hairdresser at Agen. The barber's shop was near the Prefecture—the ancient palace of the Bishop. It was situated at the corner of Lamoureux Street and the alley of the Prefecture. There Jasmin learnt the art of cutting, curling, and dressing hair, and of deftly using the comb and the razor. The master gave him instructions in the trade, and watched him while at work. Jasmin was willing and active, and was soon able to curl and shave with any apprentice in Agen.

After the day's work was over, the apprentice retired to his garret under the tiles. There he spent his evenings, and there he slept at night. Though the garret was infested by rats, he thought nothing of them; he had known them familiarly at home. They did him no harm, and they even learnt to know him. His garret became his paradise, for there he renewed his love of reading. The solitariness of his life did him good, by throwing his mind in upon himself, and

showing the mental stuff of which he was made. All the greatest and weightiest things have been done in solitude.

The first books he read were for the most part borrowed. Customers who came to the shop to be shaved or have their hair dressed, took an interest in the conversation of the bright, cheerful, dark-eyed lad, and some of them lent him books to read. What joy possessed him when he took refuge in his garret with a new book! Opening the book was like opening the door of a new world. What enchantment! What mystery! What a wonderful universe about us!

In reading a new book Jasmin forgot his impoverished boyhood, his grandfather Boé and his death in the hospital, his expulsion from the Seminary, and his mother's sale of her wedding-ring to buy bread for her children. He had now left the past behind, and a new world lay entrancingly before him. He read, and thought, and dreamed, until far on in the morning.

The first books he read were of comparatively little importance, though they furnished an opening into literature. 'The Children's Magazine'* held him in raptures for a time. Some of his friendly customers lent him the 'Fables of Florian,' and afterwards Florian's pastoral romance of 'Estelle'—perhaps his best work. The singer of the Gardon entirely bewitched Jasmin. 'Estelle' allured him into the rosy-fingered

*Magasin des Enfants.*

regions of bliss and happiness. Then Jasmin himself began to rhyme. Florian's works encouraged him to write his first verses in the harmonious Gascon patois, to which he afterwards gave such wonderful brilliancy.

In his after life Jasmin was often asked how and when he first began to feel himself a poet. Some think that the poetical gift begins at some fixed hour, just as one becomes a barrister, a doctor, or a professor. But Jasmin could not give an answer.

"I have often searched into my past life," he said, "but I have never yet found the day when I began my career of rhyming." *

There are certain gifts which men can never acquire by will and work, if God has not put the seed of them into their souls at birth; and poetry is one of those gifts.

When such a seed has been planted, its divine origin is shown by its power of growth and expansion; and in a noble soul, apparently insurmountable difficulties and obstacles cannot arrest its development. The life and career of Jasmin amply illustrates this truth. Here was a young man born in the depths of poverty. In his early life he suffered the most cruel needs of existence. When he became a barber's apprentice, he touched the lowest rung of the ladder of reputation; but he had at least learned the beginnings of knowledge.

* *Mes Nouveaux Souvenirs.*

He knew how to read, and when we know the twenty-four letters of the alphabet, we may learn almost everything that we wish to know. From that slight beginning most men may raise themselves to the heights of moral and intellectual worth by a persevering will and the faithful performance of duty.

At the same time it must be confessed that it is altogether different with poetical genius. It is not possible to tell what unforeseen and forgotten circumstances may have given the initial impulse to a poetic nature. It is not the result of any fortuitous impression, and still less of any act of the will.

It is possible that Jasmin may have obtained his first insight into poetic art during his solitary evening walks along the banks of the Garonne, or from the nightingales singing overhead, or from his chanting in the choir when a child. Perhaps the 'Fables of Florian' kindled the poetic fire within him; at all events they may have acted as the first stimulus to his art of rhyming. They opened his mind to the love of nature, to the pleasures of country life, and the joys of social intercourse.

There is nothing in the occupation of a barber incompatible with the cultivation of poetry. Folez, the old German poet, was a barber, as well as the still more celebrated Burchiello, of Florence, whose sonnets are still admired because of the purity of their style. Our own Allan Ramsay, author of 'The Gentle Shepherd,'

spent some of his early years in the same occupation. In southern and Oriental life the barber plays an important part. In the Arabian tales he is generally a shrewd, meddling, inquisitive fellow. In Spain and Italy the barber is often the one brilliant man in his town; his shop is the place where gossip circulates, and where many a pretty intrigue is contrived.

Men of culture are often the friends of barbers Buffon trusted to his barber for all the news of Montbard. Molière spent many long and pleasant hours with the barber of Pézenas. Figaro, the famous barber of Seville, was one of the most perfect prototypes of his trade. Jasmin was of the same calling as Gil Blas, inspired with the same spirit, and full of the same talent. He was a Frenchman of the South, of the same race as Villon and Marot.

Even in the prim and formal society of the eighteenth century, the barber occupied no unimportant part. He and the sculptor, of all working men, were allowed to wear the sword—that distinctive badge of gentility. In short, the barber was regarded as an artist. Besides, barbers were in ancient times surgeons; they were the only persons who could scientifically "let blood." The Barber-Surgeons of London still represent the class. They possess a cup presented to the Guild by Charles II., in commemoration of his escape while taking refuge in the oak-tree at Boscobel.*

* In England, some barbers, and barber's sons, have eventually occupied the highest positions. Arkwright, the founder of the

But to return to the adventures of Jasmin's early life. He describes with great zest his first visit to a theatre. It was situated near at hand, by the ancient palace of the Bishop. After his day's work was over—his shaving, curling, and hairdressing—he went across the square, and pressed in with the rest of the crowd. He took his seat.

"'Heavens!' said he, 'where am I?' The curtain rises! 'Oh, this is lovely! It is a new world; how beautifully they sing; and how sweetly and tenderly they speak!' I had eyes for nothing else: I was quite beside myself with joy. 'It is Cinderella,' I cried aloud in my excitement. 'Be quiet,' said my neighbour. 'Oh, sir! why quiet? Where are we? What is this?' 'You gaping idiot,' he replied, 'this is the Comedy!'

"Jasmin now remained quiet; but he saw and heard with all his eyes and ears. 'What love! what poetry!' he thought: 'it is more than a dream! It's magic. O Cinderella, Cinderella! thou art my guardian angel!'

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cotton manufacture, was originally a barber. Tenterden, Lord Chief Justice, was a barber's son, intended for a chorister in Canterbury Cathedral. Sugden, afterwards Lord Chancellor, was opposed by a noble lord while engaged in a parliamentary contest. Replying to the allegation that he was only the son of a country barber, Sugden said: "His Lordship has told you that I am nothing but the son of a country barber; but he has not told you all, for I have been a barber myself, and worked in my father's shop,—and all I wish to say about that is, that had his Lordship been born the son of a country barber, *he would have been a barber still!*"

And from this time, from day to day, I thought of being an actor!"

Jasmin entered his garret late at night; and he slept so soundly, that next morning his master went up to rouse him. "Where were you last night? Answer, knave; you were not back till midnight?" "I was at the Comedy," answered Jasmin sleepily; "it was so beautiful!" "You have been there then, and lost your head. During the day you make such an uproar, singing and declaiming. You, who have worn the cassock, should blush. But I give you up; you will come to no good. Change, indeed! You will give up the comb and razor, and become an actor! Unfortunate boy, you must be blind. Do you want to die in the hospital?"

"This terrible word," says Jasmin, "fell like lead upon my heart, and threw me into consternation. Cinderella was forthwith dethroned in my foolish mind; and my master's threat completely calmed me. I went on faithfully with my work. I curled, and plaited hair in my little room. As the saying goes, *S'il ne pleut, il bruine* (If it does not rain, it drizzles). When I suffered least, time passed all the quicker. It was then that, dreaming and happy, I found two lives within me—one in my daily work, another in my garret. I was like a bird; I warbled and sang. What happiness I enjoyed in my little bed under the tiles! I listened to the warbling of birds. Lo! the angel came, and in her sweetest voice sang to me. Then I tried to make

verses in the language of the shepherd swain. Bright thoughts came to me; great secrets were discovered. What hours! What lessons! What pleasures I found under the tiles!"

During the winter evenings, when night comes on quickly, Jasmin's small savings went to the oil merchant. He trimmed his little lamp, and went on till late, reading and rhyming. His poetical efforts, first written in French, were to a certain extent successful. While shaving his customers, he often recited to them his verses. They were amazed at the boy's cleverness, and expressed their delight. He had already a remarkable talent for recitation; and in course of time he became eloquent. It was some time, however, before his powers became generally known. The ladies whose hair he dressed, sometimes complained that their curl papers were scrawled over with writing, and, when opened out, they were found covered with verses.

The men whom he shaved spread his praises abroad. In so small a town a reputation for verse-making soon becomes known. "You can see me," he said to a customer, "with a comb in my hand, and a verse in my head. I give you always a gentle hand with my razor of velvet. My mouth recites while my hand works."

When Jasmin desired to display his oratorical powers, he went in the evenings to the quarter of the Augustins, where the spinning-women assembled, surrounded by their boys and girls. There he related to them his pleasant narratives, and recited his numerous verses.

Indeed, he even began to be patronized. His master addressed him as "Moussu,"—the master who had threatened him with ending his days in the hospital!

Thus far, everything had gone well with him. What with shaving, hairdressing, and rhyming, two years soon passed away. Jasmin was now eighteen, and proposed to start business on his own account. This required very little capital; and he had already secured many acquaintances who offered to patronize him. M. Boyer d'Agen, who has recently published the works of Jasmin, with a short preface and a bibliography,* says that he first began business as a hairdresser in the Cour Saint-Antoine, now the Cour Voltaire. When the author of this memoir was at Agen in the autumn of 1888, the proprietor of the Hotel du Petit St. Jean informed him that a little apartment had been placed at Jasmin's disposal, separated from the Hotel by the entrance to the courtyard, and that Jasmin had for a time carried on his business there.

But desiring to have a tenement of his own, he shortly after took a small house alongside the Promenade du Gravier; and he removed and carried on his trade there for about forty years. The little shop is still in existence, with Jasmin's signboard over the entrance door: "Jasmin, coiffeur des Jeunes Gens," with the

* ŒUVRES COMPLÈTES DE JACQUES JASMIN: Préface de l'Édition, Essai d'orthographe gasconne d'après les langues Romane et d'Oc, et collation de la traduction littérale. Par Boyer d'Agen. 1889. Quatre volumes.

barber's sud-dish hanging from a pendant in front. The shop is very small, with a little sitting-room behind, and several bedrooms above. When I entered the shop during my visit to Agen, I found a customer sitting before a looking-glass, wrapped in a sheet, the lower part of his face covered with lather, and a young fellow shaving his beard.

Jasmin's little saloon was not merely a shaving and a curling shop. Eventually it became known as the sanctuary of the Muses. It was visited by some of the most distinguished people in France, and became celebrated throughout Europe. But this part of the work is reserved for future chapters.

## CHAPTER IV.

### JASMIN AND MARIETTE.

JASMIN was now a bright, vivid, and handsome fellow, a favourite with men, women, and children. Of course, an attractive young man, with a pleasant, comfortable home, could not long remain single. At length love came to beautify his existence. "It was for her sake," he says, "that I first tried to make verses in the sweet patois which she spoke so well; verses in which I asked her, in rather lofty phrases, to be my guardian angel for life."

Mariette * was a pretty dark-eyed girl. She was an old companion of Jasmin's, and as they began to know each other better, the acquaintance gradually grew into affection, and finally into mutual love. She was of his own class of life, poor and hardworking. After the day's work was over, they had many a pleasant walk together on the summer evenings, along the banks of the Garonne, or up the ascending road toward the Hermitage and the rocky heights above the town. There they pledged their vows; like a poet, he promised

* In Gascon Magnounet; her pet name Marie, or in French Mariette. Madame Jasmin called herself Marie Barrère.

to love her for ever. She believed him, and loved him in return. The rest may be left to the imagination.

Jasmin still went on dreaming and rhyming! Mariette was a lovely subject for his rhymes. He read his verses to her; and she could not but be pleased with his devotion, even though recited in verse. He scribbled his rhymes upon his curl-papers; and when he had read them to his sweetheart, he used them to curl the hair of his fair customers. When too much soiled by being written on both sides, he tore them up; for as yet, he had not the slightest idea of publishing his verses.

When the minds of the young pair were finally made up, their further courtship did not last very long. They were willing to be united.

"Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing."

The wedding-day at length arrived. Jasmin does not describe his bride's dress. But he describes his own. "I might give you," he says in his *Souvenirs*, "a picture of our happy nuptial day. I might tell you at length of my newly dyed hat, my dress coat with blue facings, and my home-spun linen shirt with calico front. But I forbear all details. My godfather and godmother were at the wedding. You will see that the purse did not always respond to the wishes of the heart."

It is true that Jasmin's wedding-garment was not very sumptuous, nor was his bride's; but they did the

best that they could, and looked forward with hope. Jasmin took his wife home to the pleasant house on the Gravier; and joy and happiness sat down with them at their own fireside. There was no Charivari, because their marriage was suitable. Both had been poor, and the wife was ready and willing to share the lot of her young husband, whether in joy or sorrow. Their home was small and cosy—very different from the rat-haunted house of his lame mother and hump-backed father.

Customers came, but not very quickly. The barber's shop was somewhat removed from the more populous parts of the town. But when the customers did come, Jasmin treated them playfully and humorously. He was as lively as any Figaro; and he became such a favourite, that when his customers were shaved or had their hair dressed, they invariably returned, as well as recommended others to patronize the new coiffeur.

His little shop, which was at first nearly empty, soon became fuller and fuller of customers. People took pleasure in coming to the hair-dresser's shop, and hearing him recite his verses. He sang, he declaimed, while plying his razor or his scissors. But the chins and tresses of his sitters were in no danger from his skipping about, for he deftly used his hands as well as his head. His razor glistened lightly over the stubbly beards, and his scissors clipped neatly over the locks of his customers.

Except when so engaged, he went on rhyming. In a

little town, gossip flies about quickly, and even gets into the local papers. One day Jasmin read in one of the Agen journals, "Pegasus is a beast that often carries poets to the hospital." Were the words intended for him? He roared with laughter. Some gossip had bewitched the editor. Perhaps he was no poet. His rhymes would certainly never carry him to the hospital. Jasmin's business was becoming a little more lucrative. It is true his house was not yet fully furnished, but day by day he was adding to the plenishing. At all events his humble home protected him and his wife from wind and weather.

On one occasion M. Gontaud, an amiable young poet, in a chaffing way, addressed Jasmin as "Apollo!" in former times regarded as the god of poetry and music. The epistle appeared in a local journal. Jasmin read it aloud to his family. Gontaud alleged in his poem that Apollo had met Jasmin's mother on the banks of the Garonne, and fell in love with her; and that Jasmin, because of the merits of his poetry, was their son.

Up flamed the old pair! "What, Catherine?" cried the old man, "is it true that you have been a coquette? How! have I been only the foster-father of thy little poet?" "No! No!" replied the enraged mother; "he is all thine own! Console thyself, poor John; thou alone hast been my mate. And who is this 'Pollo, the humbug who has deceived thee so? Yes, I am lame, but when I was washing my linen, if any coxcomb had

approached me, I would have hit him on the mouth with a stroke of my mallet!" "Mother," exclaimed the daughter, "'Pollo is only a fool, not worth talking about; where does he live, Jacques?" Jasmin relished the chaff, and explained that he only lived in the old mythology, and had no part in human affairs. And thus was Apollo, the ancient god of poetry and music, sent about his business.

Years passed on, the married pair settled down quietly, and their life of happiness went on pleasantly. The honeymoon had long since passed. Jasmin had married at twenty, and Mariette was a year younger.

When a couple live together for a time, they begin to detect some little differences of opinion. It is well if they do not allow those little differences to end in a quarrel. This is always a sad beginning of a married life.

There was one thing about her husband that Mariette did not like. That was his verse-making. It was all very well in courtship, but was it worth while in business? She saw him scribbling upon curl-papers instead of attending to his periwigs. She sometimes interrupted him while he was writing; and on one occasion, while Jasmin was absent on business, she went so far as to burn his pens and throw his ink into the fire!

Jasmin was a good-natured man, but he did not like this treatment. It was not likely to end in a quiet domestic life. He expostulated, but it was of little

use. He would not give up his hobby. He went on rhyming, and in order to write down his verses he bought new pens and a new bottle of ink. Perhaps he felt the germs of poetic thought moving within him. His wife resented his conduct. Why could he not attend to the shaving and hair-dressing, which brought in money, instead of wasting his time in scribbling verses on his curl-papers?

M. Charles Nodier, member of the French Academy, paid a visit to Agen in 1832. Jasmin was then thirty-four years old. He had been married fourteen years, but his name was quite unknown, save to the people of Agen. It was well known in the town that he had a talent for versification, for he was accustomed to recite and chaunt his verses to his customers.

One quiet morning M. Nodier was taking a leisurely walk along the promenade of the Gravier, when he was attracted by a loud altercation going on between a man and a woman in the barber's shop. The woman was declaiming with the fury of a Xantippe, while the man was answering her with Homeric laughter. Nodier entered the shop, and found himself in the presence of Jasmin and his wife. He politely bowed to the pair, and said that he had taken the liberty of entering to see whether he could not establish some domestic concord between them.

"Is that all you came for?" asked the wife, at the same time somewhat calmed by the entrance of a stranger. Jasmin interposed—

"Yes, my dear—certainly; but——"

"Your wife is right, sir," said Nodier, thinking that the quarrel was about some debts he had incurred.

"Truly, sir," rejoined Jasmin; "if you were a lover of poetry, you would not find it so easy to renounce it."

"Poetry?" said Nodier; "I know a little about that myself."

"What!" replied Jasmin, "so much the better. You will be able to help me out of my difficulties."

"You must not expect any help from me, for I presume you are oppressed with debts."

"Ha, ha!" cried Jasmin, "it isn't debts, it's verses, sir."

"Yes, indeed," said the wife, "it's verses, always verses! Isn't it horrible?"

"Will you let me see what you have written?" asked Nodier, turning to Jasmin.

"By all means, sir. Here is a specimen." The verses began:

"Femme ou démon, ange ou sylphide,
Oh! par pitié, fuis, laisse-moi!
Doux miel d'amour n'est que poison perfide,
Mon cœur a trop souffert, il dort, éloigne-toi.

"Je te l'ai dit, mon cœur sommeille;
Laisse-le, de ses maux à peine il est guéri,
Et j'ai peur que ta voix si douce à mon oreille
Par un chant d'amour ne l'éveille,
Lui, que l'amour a tant meurtri!"

This was only about a fourth part of the verses which Jasmin had composed.* Nodier confessed that he was greatly pleased with them. Turning round to the wife he said, "Madame, poetry knocks at your door; open it. That which inspires it is usually a noble heart and a distinguished spirit, incapable of mean actions. Let your husband make his verses; it may bring you good luck and happiness."

Then, turning to the poet, and holding out his hand, he asked, "What is your name, my friend?"

"Jacques Jasmin," he timidly replied.

"A good name," said Nodier. "At the same time, while you give fair play to your genius, don't give up the manufacture of periwigs, for this is an honest trade, while verse-making might prove only a frivolous distraction."

Nodier then took his leave, but from that time forward Jasmin and he continued the best of friends. A few years later, when the first volume of the *Papillôtos* appeared, Nodier published his account of the above interview in *Le Temps*. He afterwards announced in the *Quotidienne* the outburst of a new poet on the banks of the Garonne—a poet full of piquant charm, of inspired harmony—a Lamartine, a Victor Hugo, a Gascon Béranger!

After Nodier's departure, Madame Jasmin took a

* The remaining verses are to be found in the collected edition of his works—the fourth volume of *Las Papillôtos*, new edition, pp. 247–9, entitled *A une jeune Voyageuse.*

more favourable view of the versification of her husband. She no longer chided him. The shop became more crowded with customers. Ladies came to have their hair dressed by the poet: it was so original! He delighted them with singing or chanting his verses. He had a sympathetic, perhaps a mesmeric voice, which touched the souls of his hearers, and threw them into the sweetest of dreams.

Besides attending to his shop, he was accustomed to go out in the afternoons to dress the hair of four or five ladies. This occupied him for about two hours, and when he found the ladies at home, he returned with four or five francs in his purse. But often they were not at home, and he came home francless. Eventually he gave up this part of his trade. The receipts at the shop were more remunerative. Madame encouraged this economical reform; she was accustomed to call it Jasmin's *coup d'état.*

The evenings passed pleasantly. Jasmin took his guitar and sang to his wife and children; or, in the summer evenings they would walk under the beautiful elms in front of the Gravier, where Jasmin was ready for business at any moment. Such prudence, such diligence, could not but have its effect. When Jasmin's first volume of the *Papillôtos* was published, it was received with enthusiasm.

"The songs, the curl-papers," said Jasmin, "brought in such a rivulet of silver, that, in my poetic joy, I broke into morsels and burnt in the fire that dreaded

arm-chair in which my ancestors had been carried to the hospital to die."

Madame Jasmin now became quite enthusiastic. Instead of breaking the poet's pens and throwing his ink into the fire, she bought the best pens and the best ink. She even supplied him with a comfortable desk, on which he might write his verses. "Courage, courage!" she would say. "Each verse that you write is another tile to the roof and a rafter to the dwelling; therefore make verses, make verses!"

The rivulet of silver increased so rapidly, that in the course of a short time Jasmin was enabled to buy the house in which he lived—tiles, rafters, and all. Instead of Pegasus carrying him to the hospital, it carried him to the office of the Notary, who enrolled him in the list of collectors of taxes. He was now a man of substance, a man to be trusted. The notary was also employed to convey the tenement to the prosperous Jasmin. He ends the first part of his *Souvenirs* with these words:

"When Pegasus kicks with a fling of his feet,
He sends me to curl on my hobby horse fleet;
I lose all my time, true, not paper nor notes,
I write all my verse on my *papillôtes*." *

* *Papillôtes*, as we have said, are curl-papers. Jasmin's words, in Gascon, are these:

"Quand Pegazo reguinno, et que d'un cot de pé
M'embôyo friza mas marotos,
Perdi moun ten, ès bray, mais noun pas moun papé,
Bôti mous bèrs en papillotos!"

## CHAPTER V.

### JASMIN AND GASCON.—FIRST VOLUME OF "PAPILLÔTES."

JASMIN'S first efforts at verse-making were necessarily imperfect. He tried to imitate the works of others, rather than create poetical images of his own. His verses consisted mostly of imitations of the French poems which he had read. He was overshadowed by the works of Boileau, Gresset, Rousseau, and especially by Béranger, who, like himself, was the son of a tailor.

The recollections of their poetry pervaded all his earlier verses. His efforts in classical French were by no means successful. It was only when he had raised himself above the influence of authors who had preceded him, that he soared into originality, and was proclaimed the Poet of the South.

Jasmin did not at first write in Gascon. In fact, he had not yet mastered a perfect knowledge of this dialect. Though familiarly used in ancient times, it did not exist in any written form. It was the speech of the common people; and though the Gascons spoke the idiom, it had lost much of its originality. It had become mixed, more or less, with the ordinary French language, and

the old Gascon words were becoming gradually forgotten.

Yet the common people, after all, remain the depositories of old idioms and old traditions, as well as of the inheritances of the past. They are the most conservative element in society. They love their old speech, their old dress, their old manners and customs, and have an instinctive worship of ancient memories. Their old idioms are long preserved. Their old dialect continues the language of the fireside, of daily toil, of daily needs, and of domestic joys and sorrows. It hovers in the air about them, and has been sucked in with their mothers' milk. Yet, when a primitive race such as the Gascons mix much with the people of the adjoining departments, the local dialect gradually dies out, and they learn to speak the language of their neighbours.

The Gascon was disappearing as a speech, and very few of its written elements survived. Was it possible for Jasmin to revive the dialect, and embody it in a written language? He knew much of the patois, from hearing it spoken at home. But now, desiring to know it more thoroughly, he set to work and studied it. He was almost as assiduous as Sir Walter Scott in learning obscure Lowland words, while writing the Waverley Novels. Jasmin went into the market-places, where the peasants from the country sold their produce; and there he picked up many new words and expressions. He made excursions into the country round Agen,

where many of the old farmers and labourers spoke nothing but Gascon. He conversed with illiterate people, and especially with old women at their spinning-wheels, and eagerly listened to their ancient tales and legends.

He thus gathered together many a golden relic, which he afterwards made use of in his poetical works. He studied Gascon like a pioneer. He made his own lexicon, and eventually formed a written dialect, which he wove into poems, to the delight of the people in the South of France. For the Gascon dialect—such is its richness and beauty—expresses many shades of meaning which are entirely lost in the modern French.

When Jasmin first read his poems in Gascon to his townspeople at Agen, he usually introduced his readings by describing the difficulties he had encountered in prosecuting his enquiries. His hearers, who knew more French than Gascon, detected in his poems many comparatively unknown words,—not indeed of his own creation, but merely the result of his patient and long-continued investigation of the Gascon dialect. Yet they found the language, as written and spoken by him, full of harmony—rich, mellifluous, and sonorous. Gascon resembles the Spanish, to which it is strongly allied, more than the Provençal, the language of the Troubadours, which is more allied to the Latin or Italian.

Hallam, in his 'History of the Middle Ages,' regards the sudden outburst of Troubadour poetry as one

symptom of the rapid impulse which the human mind received in the twelfth century, contemporaneous with the improved studies that began at the Universities. It was also encouraged by the prosperity of Southern France, which was comparatively undisturbed by internal warfare, and it continued until the tremendous storm that fell upon Languedoc during the crusade against the Albigenses, which shook off the flowers of Provençal literature.*

The language of the South-West of France, including the Gascon, was then called Langue d'Oc; while that of the south-east of France, including the Provençal, was called Langue d'Oïl. M. Littré, in the Preface to his Dictionary of the French language, says that he was induced to begin the study of the subject by his desire to know something more of the Langue d'Oïl—the old French language.†

In speaking of the languages of Western Europe, M. Littré says that the German is the oldest, beginning in the fourth century; that the French is the next,

* Hallam's 'Middle Ages,' iii. 434. 12th edit. (Murray.)

† His words are these: "La conception m'en fut suggérée par mes études sur la vieille langue française ou langue d'oïl. Je fus si frappé des liens qui unissent le français moderne au français ancien, j'aperçus tant de cas où les sens et des locutions du jour ne s'expliquent que par les sens et les locutions d'autrefois, tant d'exemples où la forme des mots n'est pas intelligible sans les formes qui ont précédé, qu'il me sembla que la doctrine et même l'usage de la langue restent mal assis s'ils ne reposent sur leur base antique." (Préface, ii.)

beginning in the ninth century; and that the English is the last, beginning in the fourteenth century. It must be remembered, however, that Plat Deutsch preceded the German, and was spoken by the Frisians, Angles, and Saxons, who lived by the shores of the North Sea.

The Gaelic or Celtic, and Kymriac languages, were spoken in the middle and north-west of France; but these, except in Brittany, have been superseded by the modern French language, which is founded mainly on Latin, German, and Celtic, but mostly on Latin. The English language consists mostly of Saxon, Norse, and Norman-French, with a mixture of Welsh or Ancient British.

That language is, however, no test of the genealogy of a people, is illustrated by the history of France itself. In the fourth and fifth centuries, the Franks, a powerful German race, from the banks of the Rhine, invaded and conquered the people north of the Somme, and eventually gave the name of France to the entire country. The Burgundians and Visigoths, also a German race, invaded France, and settled themselves in the south-east. In the year 464, Childeric the Frank took Paris.

The whole history of the occupation of France is told by Augustin Thierry, in his 'Narratives of the Merovingian Times.' "There are Franks," he says in his Preface, "who remained pure Germans in Gaul; Gallo-Romans, irritated and disgusted by the barbarian rule; Franks more or less influenced by the

manners and customs of civilised life; and 'Romans more or less barbarian in mind and manners.' The contrast may be followed in all its shades through the sixth century, and into the middle of the seventh; later, the Germanic and Gallo-Roman stamp seemed effaced and lost in a semi-barbarism clothed in theocratic forms."

The Franks, when they had completed the conquest of the entire country, gave it the name of Franken-ric —the Franks' kingdom. Eventually, Charles the Great, or Charlemagne, descended from Childeric the Frank, was in 800 crowned Emperor of the West. Towards the end of his reign, the Norsemen began to devastate the northern coast of Franken-ric. Aix-la-Chapelle was Charlemagne's capital, and there he died and was buried. At his death, the Empire was divided among his sons. The Norse Vikingers continued their invasions; and to purchase repose, Charles the Simple ceded to Duke Rollo a large territory in the north-west of France, which in deference to their origin, was known by the name of Normandy.

There Norman-French was for a long time spoken. Though the Franks had supplanted the Romans, the Roman language continued to be spoken. In 996 Paris was made the capital of France; and from that time, the language of Paris became, with various modifications, the language of France; and not only of France, but the Roman or Latin tongue became the foundation of the languages of Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

Thus, Gaulish, Frankish, and Norman disappeared to give place to the Latin-French. The Kymriac language was preserved only in Brittany, where it still lingers. And in the south-west of France, where the population was furthest removed from the invasions of the Gauls, Ostrogoths, and Visigoths, the Basques continued to preserve their language,—the Basques, who are supposed by Canon Isaac Taylor to be the direct descendants of the Etruscans.

The descendants of the Gauls, however, constitute the mass of the people in Central France. The Gauls, or Galatians, are supposed to have come from the central district of Asia Minor. They were always a warlike people. In their wanderings westward, they passed through the north of Italy and entered France, where they settled in large numbers. Dr. Smith, in his Dictionary of the Bible, says that "Gálatai is the same word as Kéltici," which indicates that the Gauls were Kelts. It is supposed that St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Galatians soon after his visit to the country of their origin. "Its abruptness and severity, and the sadness of its tone, are caused by their sudden perversion from the doctrine which the Apostle had taught them, and which at first they had received so willingly. It is no fancy, if we see in this fickleness a specimen of that 'esprit impétueux, ouvert à toutes les impressions,' and that 'mobilité extrême,' which Thierry marks as characteristic of the Gaulish race."

At all events, the language of the Gauls disappeared

in Central France to make way for the language of the Capital—the modern French, founded on the Latin. The Gaulish race, nevertheless, preserved their characteristics—quickness, lightness, mobility, and elasticity—qualities which enabled them quickly to conceive new ideas, and at the same time to quickly abandon them. The Franks had given the country the name it now bears—that of France. But they were long regarded as enemies by the Central and Southern Gauls. In Gascony, the foreigner was called *Lou Franciman*, and was regarded with suspicion and dislike.

"This term of Franciman," says Miss Costello, who travelled through the country and studied the subject, "evidently belongs to a period of the English occupation of Aquitaine, when a Frenchman was another word for an enemy." * But the word has probably a more remote origin. When the Franks, of German origin, burst into Gaul, and settled in the country north of the Loire, and afterwards carried their conquests to the Pyrenees, the Franks were regarded as enemies in the south of France.

"Then all the countries," says Thierry, "united by force to the empire of the Franks, and over which in consequence of this union, the name of France had extended itself, made unheard-of efforts to reconquer their ancient names and places. Of all the Gallic provinces, none but the southern ones succeeded in this

* 'Bearn and the Pyrenees,' i. 348.

great enterprise; and after the wars of insurrection which, under the sons of Charlemagne, succeeded the wars of conquest, Aquitaine and Provence became distinct states. Among the South Eastern provinces reappeared even the ancient name of Gaul, which had for ever perished north of the Loire. The chiefs of the new Kingdom of Arles, which extended from the Jura to the Alps, took the title of Gaul in opposition to the Kings of France." *

It is probable that this was the cause of the name of "Franciman" being regarded as an hereditary term of reproach in the Gaulish country south of the Loire. Gascon and Provençal were the principal dialects which remained in the South, though Littré classes them together as the language of the Troubadours. They were both well understood in the South; and Jasmin's recitations were received with as much enthusiasm at Nîmes, Arles, and Marseilles, as at Toulouse, Agen, and Bordeaux.

Mezzofanti, a very Tower of Babel in dialects and languages, said of the Provençal, that it was the only patois of the Middle Ages, with its numerous derivations from the Greek, the Arabic, and the Latin, which has survived the various revolutions of language. The others have been altered and modified. They have suffered from the caprices of victory or of fortune. Of all the dialects of the Roman tongue, this patois alone

* THIERRY—'Historical Essays,' No. XXIV.

preserves its purity and life. It still remains the sonorous and harmonious language of the Troubadours. The patois has the suppleness of the Italian, the sombre majesty of the Spanish, the energy and preciseness of the Latin, with the "Molle atque facetum, le dolce de l'Ionic," which still lives among the Phocéens of Marseilles. The imagination and genius of Gascony have preserved the copious richness of the language.

M. de Lavergne, in his notice of Jasmin's works, frankly admits the local jealousy which existed between the Troubadours of Gascony and Provence. There seemed, he said, to be nothing disingenuous in the silence of the Provençals as to Jasmin's poems. They did not allow that he borrowed from them, any more than that they borrowed from him. These men of Southern France are born in the land of poetry. It breathes in their native air. It echoes round them in its varied measures. Nay, the rhymes which are its distinguishing features, pervade their daily talk. The seeds lie dormant in their native soil, and when trodden under foot, they burst through the ground and evolve their odour in the open air. Gascon and Provençal alike preserve the same relation to the classic romance—that lovely but short-lived eldest daughter of the Latin—the language of the Troubadours.

We have said that the Gascon dialect was gradually expiring when Jasmin undertook its revival. His success in recovering and restoring it, and presenting it in a written form, was the result of laborious

investigation. He did not at first realize the perfect comprehension of the idiom, but he eventually succeeded by patient perseverance. When we read his poems, we are enabled to follow, step by step, his lexicological progress. At first, he clung to the measures most approved in French poetry, especially to Alexandrines and Iambic tetrameters, and to their irregular association in a sort of ballad metre, which in England has been best handled by Robert Browning in his fine ballad of 'Harvé Riel.'

Jasmin's first rhymes were written upon curl papers, and then used on the heads of his lady customers. When the spirit of original poetry within him awoke, his style changed. Genius brought sweet music from his heart and mind. Imagination spiritualised his nature, lifted his soul above the cares of ordinary life, and awakened the consciousness of his affinity with what is pure and noble. Jasmin sang as a bird sings; at first in weak notes, then in louder, until at length his voice filled the skies. Near the end of his life he was styled the Saint Vincent de Paul of poetry.

Jasmin might be classed among the Uneducated Poets. But what poet is not uneducated at the beginning of his career? The essential education of the poet is not taught in the schools. The lowly man, against whom the asperities of his lot have closed the doors of worldly academies, may nevertheless have some special vocation for the poetic life. Academies cannot shut him out from the odour of the violet or the

song of the nightingale. He hears the lark's song filling the heavens, as the happy bird fans the milk-white cloud with its wings. He listens to the purling of the brook, the bleating of the lamb, the song of the milkmaid, and the joyous cry of the reaper. Thus his mind is daily fed with the choicest influences of nature. He cannot but appreciate the joy, the glory, the unconscious delight of living. "The beautiful is master of a star." This feeling of beauty is the nurse of civilisation and true refinement. Have we not our Burns, who

> "in glory and in joy
> Followed his plough along the mountain side;"

Clare, the peasant boy; Bloomfield, the farmer's lad; Tannahill, the weaver; Allan Ramsay, the perukemaker; Cooper, the shoemaker; and Critchley Prince, the factory-worker; but greater than these was Shakespeare,—though all were of humble origin.

France too has had its uneducated poets. Though the ancient song-writers of France were noble; Henry IV., author of *Charmante Gabrielle;* Thibault, Count of Champagne; Lusignan, Count de la Marche; Raval, Blondel, and Basselin de la Vive, whose songs were as joyous as the juice of his grapes; yet some of the best French poets of modern times have been of humble origin—Marmontel, Molière, Rousseau, and Béranger. There were also Reboul, the baker; Hibley, the working-tailor; Gonzetta, the shoemaker; Durand, the joiner; Marchand, the lacemaker; Voileau, the sail-maker;

Magu, the weaver; Poucy, the mason; Germiny, the cooper;* and finally, Jasmin the barber and hair-dresser, who was not the least of the Uneducated Poets.

The first poem which Jasmin composed in the Gascon dialect was written in 1822, when he was only twenty-four years old. It was entitled *La fidelitat Agenoso,* which he subsequently altered to *Me cal Mouri* (*Il me fait mourir*), or "Let me die." It is a languishing romantic poem, after the manner of Florian, Jasmin's first master in poetry. It was printed at Agen in a quarto form, and sold for a franc. Jasmin did not attach his name to the poem, but only his initials.

Sainte-Beuve, in his notice of the poem, says, "It is a pretty, sentimental romance, showing that Jasmin possessed the brightness and sensibility of the Troubadours. As one may say, he had not yet quitted the guitar for the flageolet; and Marot, who spoke of his flageolet, had not, in the midst of his playful spirit, those tender accents which contrasted so well with his previous compositions. And did not Henry IV., in the midst of his Gascon gaieties and sallies, compose his sweet song of *Charmante Gabrielle?* Jasmin indeed is the poet who is nearest the region of Henry IV."†

*Me cal Mouri* was set to music by Fourgons, and

* 'Les Poètes du Peuple au xix. Siècle.' Par Alphonse Viollet. Paris, 1846.

† 'Portraits contemporains,' ii. 61 (ed. 1847).

obtained great popularity in the south. It was known by heart, and sung everywhere; in Agen, Toulouse, and throughout Provence. It was not until the publication of the first volume of his poems that it was known to be the work of Jasmin.

Miss Louisa Stuart Costello, when making her pilgrimage in the South of France, relates that, in the course of her journey, "A friend repeated to me two charming ballads picked up in Languedoc, where there is a variety in the patois. I cannot resist giving them here, that my readers may compare the difference of dialect. I wrote them down, however, merely by ear, and am not aware that they have ever been printed. The mixture of French, Spanish, and Italian is very curious."*

As the words of Jasmin's romance were written down by Miss Costello from memory, they are not quite accurate; but her translation into English sufficiently renders the poet's meaning. The following is the first verse of Jasmin's poem in Gascon—

"Dejà la nèy encrumis la naturo,
Tout ès tranquille et tout cargo lou dol;
Dins lou clouchè la brezâgo murmùro,
Et lou tuquet succèdo al rossignol:
Del mal, hélas! bebi jusq'à la ligo,
Moun cò gémis sans espouèr de gari;
Plus de bounhur, èy perdut moun amigo,
Me cal mouri! me cal mouri!"

* 'Pilgrimage to Auvergne,' ii. 210.

Which Miss Costello thus translates into English:

"Already sullen night comes sadly on,
And nature's form is clothed with mournful weeds;
Around the tower is heard the breeze's moan,
And to the nightingale the bat succeeds.
Oh! I have drained the cup of misery,
My fainting heart has now no hope in store.
Ah! wretched me! what have I but to die?
For I have lost my love for evermore!"

There are four verses in the poem, but the second verse may also be given—

"Fair, tender Phœbe, hasten on thy course,
My woes revive while I behold thee shine,
For of my hope thou art no more the source,
And of my happiness no more the sign.
Oh! I have drained the cup of misery,
My fainting heart has now no bliss in store.
Ah! wretched me! what have I but to die?
Since I have lost my love for evermore!"

The whole of the poem was afterwards translated into modern French, and, though somewhat artificial, it became as popular in the north as in the south.

Jasmin's success in his native town, and his growing popularity, encouraged him to proceed with the making of verses. His poems were occasionally inserted in the local journals; but the editors did not approve of his use of the expiring Gascon dialect. They were of opinion that his works might be better appreciated if they appeared in modern French. Gascon was to a

large extent a foreign language, and greatly interfered with Jasmin's national reputation as a poet.

Nevertheless he held on his way, and continued to write his verses in Gascon. They contained many personal lyrics, tributes, dedications, hymns for festivals, and impromptus, scarcely worthy of being collected and printed. Jasmin said of the last description of verse: "One can only pay a poetical debt by means of impromptus, and though they may be good money of the heart, they are almost always bad money of the head."

Jasmin's next poem was *The Charivari* (Lou Charibari), also written in Gascon. It was composed in 1825, when he was twenty-seven years old; and dedicated to M. Duprount, the Advocate, who was himself a poetaster. The dedication contained some fine passages of genuine beauty and graceful versification. It was in some respects an imitation of the *Lutrin* of Boileau. It was very different from the doggerel in which he had taken part with his humpbacked father so long ago. Then he had blown the cow-horn, now he spoke with the tongue of a trumpet. The hero of Jasmin's *Charivari* was one Aduber, an old widower, who dreamt of remarrying. It reminded one of the strains of Béranger; in other passages of the mock-heroic poem of Boileau.

Though the poem when published was read with much interest, it was not nearly so popular as *Me cal Mouri.* This last-mentioned poem, his first published work, touched the harp of sadness; while his *Charivari*

displayed the playfulness of joy. Thus, at the beginning of his career, Jasmin revealed himself as a poet in two very different styles; in one, touching the springs of grief, and in the other exhibiting brightness and happiness. At the end of the same year he sounded his third and deepest note in his poem *On the Death of General Foy*—one of France's truest patriots. Now his lyre was complete; it had its three strings—of sadness, joy, and sorrow.

These three poems—*Me cal Mouri*, the *Charivari*, and the ode *On the Death of General Foy*, with some other verses—were published in 1825. What was to be the title of the volume? As Adam, the carpenter-poet of Nevers, had entitled his volume of poetry 'Shavings,' so Jasmin decided to name his collection 'The Curl-papers of Jasmin, Coiffeur of Agen.' The title was a good one, and the subsequent volumes of his works were known as La Papillôtos (the Curl-papers) of Jasmin. The publication of this first volume served to make Jasmin's name popular beyond the town in which they had been composed and published. His friend M. Gaze said of him, that during the year 1825 he had been marrying his razor with the swan's quill; and that his hand of velvet in shaving was even surpassed by his skill in verse-making.

Charles Nodier, his old friend, who had entered the barber's shop some years before to intercede between the poet and his wife, sounded Jasmin's praises in the Paris journals. He confessed that he had been greatly

struck with the *Charivari*, and boldly declared that the language of the Troubadours, which everyone supposed to be dead, was still in full life in France; that it not only lived, but that at that very moment a poor barber at Agen, without any instruction beyond that given by the fields, the woods, and the heavens, had written a serio-comic poem which, at the risk of being thought crazy by his colleagues of the Academy, he considered to be better composed than the *Lutrin* of Boileau, and even better than one of Pope's masterpieces, the *Rape of the Lock.*

The first volume of the *Papillôtes* sold very well; and the receipts from its sale not only increased Jasmin's income, but also increased his national reputation. Jasmin was not, however, elated by success. He remained simple, frugal, honest, and hard-working. He was not carried off his feet by éclat. Though many illustrious strangers, when passing through Agen, called upon and interviewed the poetical coiffeur, he quietly went back to his razors, his combs, and his periwigs, and cheerfully pursued the business that he could always depend upon in his time of need.

## CHAPTER VI.

MISCELLANEOUS VERSES—BÉRANGER—'MES SOUVENIRS'—PAUL DE MUSSET.

DURING the next four years Jasmin composed no work of special importance. He occasionally wrote poetry, but chiefly on local subjects. In 1828 he wrote an impromptu to M. Pradel, who had improvised a Gascon song in honour of the poet. The Gascon painter, Champmas, had compared Jasmin to a ray of sunshine, and in 1829 the poet sent him a charming piece of verse in return for his compliment.

In 1830 Jasmin composed *The Third of May*, which was translated into French by M. Duvigneau. It appears that the Count of Dijon had presented to the town of Nerac, near Agen, a bronze statue of Henry IV., executed by the sculptor Raggi—of the same character as the statue erected to the same monarch at Pau. But though Henry IV. was born at Pau, Nerac was perhaps more identified with him, for there he had his strong castle, though only its ruins now remain.

Nerac was at one time almost the centre of the

Reformation in France. Clement Marot, the poet of the Reformed faith, lived there; and the house of Théodore de Bèze, who emigrated to Geneva, still exists. The Protestant faith extended to Agen and the neighbouring towns. When the Roman Catholics obtained the upper hand, persecutions began. Vindocin, the pastor, was burned alive at Agen. J. J. Scaliger was an eye-witness of the burning, and he records the fact that not less than 300 victims perished for their faith.

At a later time Nerac, which had been a prosperous town, was ruined by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes; for the Protestant population, who had been the most diligent and industrious in the town and neighbourhood, were all either "converted," hanged, sent to the galleys, or forced to emigrate to England, Holland, or Prussia. Nevertheless, the people of Nerac continued to be proud of their old monarch.

The bronze statue of Henry IV. was unveiled in 1829. On one side of the marble pedestal supporting the statue were the words "*Alumno, mox patri nostro, Henrico quarto,*" and on the reverse side was a verse in the Gascon dialect:

"Brâbes Gascons!
A moun amou per bous aou dibès creyre;
Benès! Benès! èy plazé de bous beyre!
Approucha-bous!"

The words were assumed to be those of Henry IV., and may be thus translated into English:

"Brave Gascons!
You may well trust my love for you;
Come! come! I leave to you my glory!
Come near! Approach!" *

It is necessary to explain how the verse in Gascon came to be engraved on the pedestal of the statue. The Society of Agriculture, Sciences, and Arts, of Agen, offered a prize of 300 francs for the best Ode to the memory of Henry the Great. Many poems were accordingly sent in to the Society; and, after some consideration, it was thought that the prize should be awarded to M. Jude Patissié. But amongst the thirty-nine poems which had been presented for examination, it was found that two had been written in the Gascon dialect. The committee were at first of opinion that they could not award the prize to the author of any poem written in the vulgar tongue.

At the same time they reported that one of the poems written in Gascon possessed such real merit,

* * M. Duvigneau thus translated the words into French: he begins his verses by announcing the birth of Henry IV.:—

"A son aspect, mille cris d'allégresse
Ébranlent le palais et montent jusqu'au ciel:
Le voilà beau comme dans sa jeunesse,
Alors qu'il recevait le baiser maternel.
A ce peuple charmé qui des yeux le dévore
Le bon Roi semble dire encore:
'Braves Gascons, accourez tous;
A mon amour pour vous vous devez croire;
Je met à vous revoir mon bonheur et ma gloire,
Venez, venez, approchez-vous!'"

that the committee decided by a unanimous vote that a prize should be awarded to the author of the best poem written in the Gascon dialect. Many poems were accordingly sent in and examined. *Lou Tres de May* was selected as the best; and on the letter attached to the poem being opened, the president proclaimed the author to be "Jasmin, Coiffeur." After the decision of the Society at Agen, the people of Nerac desired to set their seal upon their judgment, and they accordingly caused the above words to be engraved on the reverse side of the pedestal supporting the statue of Henry IV. Jasmin's poem was crowned by the Academy of Agen; and though it contained many fine verses, it had the same merits and the same defects as the *Charivari*, published a few years before.

M. Rodière, Professor of Law at Toulouse, was of opinion that during the four years during which Jasmin produced no work of any special importance, he was carefully studying Gascon; for it ought to be known that the language in which Godolin wrote his fine poems is not without its literature. "The fact," says Rodière, "that Jasmin used some of his time in studying the works of Godolin is, that while in *Lou Charibari* there are some French words ill-disguised in a Gascon dress, on the other hand, from the year 1830, there are none; and the language of Jasmin is the same as the language of Godolin, except for a few trifling differences, due to the different dialects of Agen and Toulouse."

Besides studying Gascon, Jasmin had some military duties to perform. He was corporal of the third company of the National Guard of Agen; and in 1830 he addressed his comrades in a series of verses. One of these was a song entitled 'The Flag of Liberty' (*Lou Drapèou de la Libertat*); another, 'The Good All-merciful God!' (*Lou Boun Diou liberal*); and the third was *Lou Sèromen.*

Two years later, in 1832, Jasmin composed *The Gascons,* which he improvised at a banquet given to the non-commissioned officers of the 14th Chasseurs. Of course, the improvisation was carefully prepared; and it was composed in French, as the non-commissioned officers did not understand the Gascon dialect. Jasmin extolled the valour of the French, and especially of the Gascons. The last lines of his eulogy ran as follows:—

"O Liberty! mother of victory,
Thy flag always brings us success!
Though as Gascons we sing of thy glory,
We chastise our foes with the French!"

In the same year Jasmin addressed the poet Béranger in a pleasant poetical letter written in classical French. Béranger replied in prose; his answer was dated the 12th of July, 1832. He thanked Jasmin for his fervent eulogy. While he thought that the Gascon poet's praise of his works was exaggerated, he believed in his sincerity.

"I hasten," said Béranger, "to express my thanks for the kindness of your address. Believe in my sincerity, as I believe in your praises. Your exaggeration of my poetical merits makes me repeat the first words of your address, in which you assume the title of a Gascon* poet. It would please me much better if you would be a French poet, as you prove by your epistle, which is written with taste and harmony. The sympathy of our sentiments has inspired you to praise me in a manner which I am far from meriting. Nevertheless, sir, I am proud of your sympathy.

"You have been born and brought up in the same condition as myself. Like me, you appear to have triumphed over the absence of scholastic instruction, and, like me too, you love your country. You reproach me, sir, with the silence which I have for some time preserved. At the end of this year I intend to publish my last volume; I will then take my leave of the public. I am now fifty-two years old. I am tired of the world. My little mission is fulfilled, and the public has had enough of me. I am therefore making arrangements for retiring. Without the desire for living longer, I have broken silence too soon. At least you must pardon the silence of one who has never demanded anything of his country. I care nothing about power, and have now merely the ambition of a morsel of bread and repose.

* Gascon or Gasconade is often used as implying *boasting* or *gasconading*.

"I ask your pardon for submitting to you these personal details. But your epistle makes it my duty. I thank you again for the pleasure you have given me. I do not understand the language of Languedoc, but, if you speak this language as you write French, I dare to prophecy a true success in the further publication of your works.—BÉRANGER." *

Notwithstanding this advice of Béranger and other critics, Jasmin continued to write his poems in the Gascon dialect. He had very little time to spare for the study of classical French; he was occupied with the trade by which he earned his living, and his business was increasing. His customers were always happy to hear him recite his poetry while he shaved their beards or dressed their hair.

He was equally unfortunate with M. Minier of Bordeaux. Jasmin addressed him in a Gascon letter full of bright poetry, not unlike Burns's *Vision,* when he dreamt of becoming a song-writer. The only consolation that Jasmin received from M. Minier was a poetical letter, in which the poet was implored to retain his position and not to frequent the society of distinguished persons.

Perhaps the finest work which Jasmin composed at this period of his life was that which he entitled *Mous Soubenis,* or 'My Recollections.' In none of his poems

* This letter was written before Jasmin had decided to publish the second volume of his *Papillôtes,* which appeared in 1835.

did he display more of the characteristic qualities of his mind, his candour, his pathos, and his humour, than in these verses. He used the rustic dialect, from which he never afterwards departed. He showed that the Gascon was not yet a dead language; and he lifted it to the level of the most serious themes. His verses have all the greater charm because of their artless gaiety, their delicate taste, and the sweetness of their cadence.

Jasmin began to compose his 'Recollections' in 1830, but the two first cantos were not completed until two years later. The third canto was added in 1835, when the poem was published in the first volume of his 'Curl-Papers' (*Papillôtes*). These recollections, in fact, constitute Jasmin's autobiography, and we are indebted to them for the description we have already given of the poet's early life.

Many years later Jasmin wrote his *Mous noubèls Soubenis*—'My New Recollections'; but in that work he returned to the trials and the enjoyments of his youth, and described few of the events of his later life. "What a pity," says M. Rodière, "that Jasmin did not continue to write his impressions until the end of his life! What trouble he would have saved his biographers! For how can one speak when Jasmin ceases to sing?"

It is unnecessary to return to the autobiography and repeat the confessions of Jasmin's youth. His joys and sorrows are all described there—his birth in the poverty-stricken dwelling in the Rue Fon de Raché, his love

for his parents, his sports with his playfellows on the banks of the Garonne, his blowing the horn in his father's Charivaris, his enjoyment of the tit-bits which old Boé brought home from his begging-tours, the decay of the old man, and his conveyance to the hospital, "where all the Jasmins die;" then his education at the Academy, his toying with the house-maid, his stealing the preserves, his expulsion from the seminary, and the sale of his mother's wedding-ring to buy bread for her family.

While composing the first two cantos of the *Souvenirs* he seemed half ashamed of the homeliness of the tale he had undertaken to relate. Should he soften and brighten it? Should he dress it up with false lights and colours? For there are times when falsehood in silk and gold are acceptable, and the naked new-born truth is unwelcome. But he repudiated the thought, and added:—

> "Myself, nor less, nor more, I'll draw for you,
> And if not bright, the likeness shall be *true*."

The third canto of the poem was composed at intervals It took him two more years to finish it. It commences with his apprenticeship to the barber; describes his first visit to the theatre, his reading of Florian's romances and poems, his solitary meditations, and the birth and growth of his imagination. Then he falls in love, and a new era opens in his life. He writes verses and sings them. He opens a barber's shop of his own,

marries, and brings his young bride home. "Two angels," he says, "took up their abode with me." His newly-wedded wife was one, and the other was his rustic Muse—the angel of homely pastoral poetry:

"Who, fluttering softly from on high,
Raised on his wing and bore me far,
Where fields of balmiest ether are;
There, in the shepherd lassie's speech
I sang a song, or shaped a rhyme;
There learned I stronger love than I can teach.
Oh, mystic lessons! Happy time!
And fond farewells I said, when at the close of day,
Silent she led my spirit back whence it was borne away!"

He then speaks of the happiness of his wedded life; he shaves and sings most joyfully. A little rivulet of silver passes into the barber's shop, and, in a fit of poetic ardour, he breaks into pieces and burns the wretched arm-chair in which his ancestors were borne to the hospital to die. His wife no longer troubles him with her doubts as to his verses interfering with his business. She supplies him with pen, paper, ink, and a comfortable desk; and, in course of time, he buys the house in which he lives, and becomes a man of importance in Agen. He ends the third canto with a sort of hurrah—

"Thus, reader, have I told my tale in cantos three:
Though still I sing, I hazard no great risk;
For should Pegasus rear and fling me, it is clear,

However ruffled all my fancies fair,
I waste my time, 'tis true; though verses I may lose,
The paper still will serve for curling hair." *

Robert Nicoll, the Scotch poet, said of his works: "I have written my *heart* in my poems; and rude, unfinished, and hasty as they are, it can be read there." Jasmin might have used the same words. "With all my faults," he said, "I desired to write the truth, and I have described it as I saw it." In his 'Recollections' he showed without reserve his whole heart.

Jasmin dedicated his 'Recollections,' when finished, to M. Florimond de Saint-Amand, one of the first gentlemen who recognised his poetical talents. This was unquestionably the first poem in which Jasmin exhibited the true bent of his genius. He avoided entirely the French models which he had before endeavoured to imitate; and he now gave full flight to the artless gaiety and humour of his Gascon muse. It is unfortunate that the poem cannot be translated into English. It was translated into French; but even in that kindred language it lost much of its beauty and pathos. The more exquisite the poetry that is contained

* The following are the lines in Gascon:—

"Atai boudroy dan bous fini ma triplo paouzo;
Mais anfin, èy cantat, n'hazardi pas gran caouzo:
Quand Pegazo reguinno, et que d'un cot de pé
M'embôyo friza mas marotos,
Perdi moun ten, ès bray, mais noun pas moun papè;
Bôti mous bèrs en papillotos!"

in one language, the more difficulty there is in translating it into another.

M. Charles Nodier said of *Lou Tres de May* that it contains poetic thoughts conveyed in exquisite words; but it is impossible to render it into any language but its own. In the case of the *Charivari* he shrinks from attempting to translate it. There is one passage containing a superb description of the rising of the sun in winter; but two of the lines quite puzzled him. In Gascon they are—

"Quand l'Auroro, fourrado en raoubo de sati,
Desparrouillo, san brut, las portos del mati."

Some of the words translated into French might seem vulgar, though in Gascon they are beautiful. In English they might be rendered:

"When Aurora, enfurred in her robe of satin,
Unbars, without noise, the doors of the morning."

"Dream if you like," says Nodier, "of the Aurora of winter, and tell me if Homer could have better robed it in words. The Aurora of Jasmin is quite his own; 'unbars the doors of the morning'; it is done without noise, like a goddess, patient and silent, who announces herself to mortals only by her brightness of light. It is this finished felicity of expression which distinguishes great writers. The vulgar cannot accomplish it."

Again Nodier says of the 'Recollections': "They are an ingenuous marvel of gaiety, sensibility, and passion!

I use," he says, "this expression of enthusiasm; and I regret that I cannot be more lavish in my praises. There is almost nothing in modern literature, and scarcely anything in ancient, which has moved me more profoundly than the *Souvenirs* of Jasmin. Happy and lovely children of Guienne and Languedoc, read and re-read the *Souvenirs* of Jasmin; they will give you painful recollections of public schools, and perhaps give you hope of better things to come. You will learn by heart what you will never forget. You will know from this poetry all that you ought to treasure."

Jasmin added several other poems to his collection before his second volume appeared in 1835. Amongst these were his lines on the Polish nation—*Aux débris de la Nation Polonaise*, and *Les Oiseaux Voyageurs, ou Les Polonais en France*—both written in Gascon. Saint-Beuve thinks the latter one of Jasmin's best works. "It is full of pathos," he says, "and rises to the sublime through its very simplicity. It is indeed difficult to exaggerate the poetic instinct and the unaffected artlessness of this amiable bard. At the same time," he said, "Jasmin still wanted the fire of passion to reach the noblest poetic work. Yet he had the art of style. If Agen was renowned as 'the eye of Guienne,' Jasmin was certainly the greatest poet who had ever written in the pure patois of Agen."

Sainte-Beuve also said of Jasmin that he was "invariably sober." And Jasmin said of himself, "I have learned that in moments of heat and emotion we are all

eloquent and laconic, alike in speech and action—unconscious poets in fact; and I have also learned that it is possible for a muse to become all this willingly, and by dint of patient toil."

Another of his supplementary poems consisted of a dialogue between Ramoun, a soldier of the Old Guard, and Mathiou, a peasant. It is of a political cast, and Jasmin did not shine in politics. He was, however, always a patriot, whether under the Empire, the Monarchy, or the Republic. He loved France above all things, while he entertained the warmest affection for his native province. If Jasmin had published his volume in classical French he might have been lost amidst a crowd of rhymers; but as he published the work in his native dialect, he became forthwith distinguished in his neighbourhood, and was ever after known as the Gascon poet.

Nor did he long remain unknown beyond the district in which he lived. When his second volume appeared in 1835, with a preface by M. Baze, an advocate of the Royal Court of Agen, it created considerable excitement, not only at Bordeaux and Toulouse, but also a Paris, the centre of the literature, science, and fine arts of France. There, men of the highest distinction welcomed the work with enthusiasm.

M. Baze, in his preface, was very eulogistic. "We have the pleasure," he said, "of seeing united in one collection the sweet Romanic tongue which the South of France has adopted, like the privileged children of her

lovely sky and voluptuous climate; and her lyrical songs, whose masculine vigour and energetic sentiments have more than once excited patriotic transports and awakened popular enthusiasm. For Jasmin is above all a poet of the people. He is not ashamed of his origin. He was born in the midst of them, and though a poet, still belongs to them. For genius is of all stations and ranks of life. He is but a hairdresser at Agen, and more than that, he wishes to remain so. His ambition is to unite the razor to the poet's pen."

At Paris the work was welcomed with applause, first by his poetic sponsor, Charles Nodier, in the *Temps*, where he congratulated Jasmin on using the Gascon patois, though still under the ban of literature. "It is a veritable Saint Bartholomew of innocent and beautiful idioms, which can scarcely be employed even in the hours of recreation." He pronounced Jasmin to be a Gascon Béranger, and quoted several of his lines from the *Charivari*, but apologised for their translation into French, fearing that they might lose much of their rustic artlessness and soft harmony.

What was a still greater honour, Jasmin was reviewed by the first critic of France—Sainte-Beuve—in the leading critical journal, the *Revue des deux Mondes*. The article was afterwards republished in his Contemporary Portraits.* He there gives a general

* 'Portraits Contemporains,' ii. 50 Par C. A. Sainte-Beuve, Membre de l'Académie Française. 18

account of his poems; compares him with the English and Scotch poets of the working class; and contrasts him with Reboul, the baker of Nîmes, who writes in classical French, after the manner of the 'Meditations of Lamartine.' He proceeds to give a brief account of Jasmin's life, taken from the *Souvenirs*, which he regards as a beautiful work, written with much artlessness and simplicity.

Various other reviews of Jasmin's poems appeared, in Agen, Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Paris, by men of literary mark—by Léonce de Lavergne, and De Mazude in the *Revue des deux Mondes*—by Charles Labitte, M. Ducuing, and M. de Pontmartin. The latter classed Jasmin with Theocritus, Horace, and La Fontaine, and paid him the singular tribute, "that he had made Goodness as attractive as other French writers had made Badness." Such criticisms as these made Jasmin popular, not only in his own district, but throughout France.

We cannot withhold the interesting statement of Paul de Musset as to his interview with Jasmin in 1836, after the publication of his second volume of poems. Paul de Musset was the author of several novels, as well as of *Lui et Elle*, apropos of his brother's connection with George Sand. Paul de Musset thus describes his visit to the poet at Agen.*

* 'Perpignan, l'Ariège et le poète Jasmin' (Journal politique et littéraire de Lot-et-Garonne).

."Let no one return northward by the direct road from Toulouse. Nothing can be more dreary than the Lot, the Limousin, and the interminable Dordogne; but make for Bordeaux by the plains of Gascony, and do not forget the steamboat from Marmande. You will then find yourself on the Garonne, in the midst of a beautiful country, where the air is vigorous and healthy. The roads are bordered with vines, arranged in arches, lovely to the eyes of travellers. The poets, who delight in making the union of the vine with the trees which support it an emblem of marriage, can verify their comparisons only in Gascony or Italy. It is usually pear trees that are used to support them. . . .

"Thanks to M. Charles Nodier, who had discovered a man of modest talent buried in this province, I knew a little of the verses of the Gascon poet Jasmin. Early one morning, at about seven, the diligence stopped in the middle of a Place, where I read this inscription over a shop-door, '*Jasmin, Coiffeur des jeunes gens.*' We were at Agen. I descended, swallowed my cup of coffee as fast as I could, and entered the shop of the most lettered of peruke-makers. On a table was a mass of pamphlets and some of the journals of the South.

"'Monsieur Jasmin?' said I on entering. 'Here I am, sir, at your service,' replied a handsome brown-haired fellow, with a cheerful expression, who seemed to me about thirty years of age.

"'Will you shave me?' I asked. 'Willingly, sir,' he replied. I sat down and we entered into conversa-

tion. 'I have read your verses, sir,' said I, while he was covering my chin with lather. 'Monsieur then comprehends the patois?' 'A little,' I said; 'one of my friends has explained to me the difficult passages. But tell me, Monsieur Jasmin, why is it that you, who appear to know French perfectly, write in a language that is not spoken in any chief town or capital.'

"'Ah, sir, how could a poor rhymer like me appear amongst the great celebrities of Paris? I have sold eighteen hundred copies of my little pieces of poetry (in pamphlet form), and certainly all who speak Gascon know them well. Remember that there are at least six millions of people in Languedoc.'

"My mouth was covered with soap-suds, and I could not answer him for some time. Then I said, 'But a hundred thousand persons at most know how to read, and twenty thousand of them can scarcely be able to enjoy your works.'

"'Well, sir, I am content with that amount. Perhaps you have at Paris more than one writer who possesses his twenty thousand readers. My little reputation would soon carry me astray if I ventured to address all Europe. The voice that appears sonorous in a little place is not heard in the midst of a vast plain. And then, my readers are confined within a radius of forty leagues, and the result is of real advantage to an author.'

"'Ah! And why do you not abandon your razor?' I enquired of this singular poet. 'What would you

have?' he said. 'The Muses are most capricious; to-day they give gold, to-morrow they refuse bread. The razor secures me soup, and perhaps a bottle of Bordeaux. Besides, my salon is a little literary circle, where all the young people of the town assemble. When I come from one of the academies of which I am a member, I find myself among the tools which I can manage better than my pen; and most of the members of the circle usually pass through my hands.'

"It is a fact that M. Jasmin shaves more skilfully than any other poet. After a long conversation with this simple-minded man, I experienced a certain confusion in depositing upon his table the amount of fifty centimes which I owed him on this occasion, more for his talent than for his razor; and I remounted the diligence more than charmed with the modesty of his character and demeanour."

## CHAPTER VII.

### 'THE BLIND GIRL OF CASTEL-CUILLÉ.'

JASMIN was now thirty-six years old. He was virtually in the prime of life. He had been dreaming, he had been thinking, for many years, of composing some poems of a higher order than his *Souvenirs*. He desired to embody in his work some romantic tales in verse, founded upon local legends, noble in conception, elaborated with care, and impressive by the dignity of simple natural passion.

In these new lyrical poems his intention was to aim high, and he succeeded to a marvellous extent. He was enabled to show the depth and strength of his dramatic powers, his fidelity in the description of romantic and picturesque incidents, his shrewdness in reading character and his skill in representing it, all of which he did in perfect innocence of all established canons in the composition of dramatic poetry.

The first of Jasmin's poetical legends was 'The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé' (*L'Abuglo*). It was translated into English, a few years after its appearance, by Lady Georgiana Fullerton, daughter of the British

ambassador at Paris,* and afterwards by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the American poet. Longfellow follows the rhythm of the original, and on the whole his translation of the poem is more correct, so that his version is to be preferred. He begins his version with these words—

> "Only the Lowland tongue of Scotland might
> Rehearse this little tragedy aright;
> Let me attempt it with an English quill,
> And take, O reader, for the deed the will."

At the end of his translation Longfellow adds:—"Jasmin, the author of this beautiful poem, is to the South of France what Burns is to the South of Scotland, the representative of the heart of the people,—one of those happy bards who are born with their mouths full of birds (*la bouco plcno d'auuvelous*). He has written his own biography in a poetic form, and the simple narrative of his poverty, his struggles, and his triumphs, is very touching. He still lives at Agen, on the Garonne, and long may he live there to delight his native land with native songs!" It is unnecessary to quote the poem, which is so well-known by the numerous readers

* The translation appeared in 'Bentley's Miscellany' for March 1840. It was published for a charitable purpose. Mrs. Craven, in her 'Life of Lady Georgiana Fullerton,' says: "It was put in at once, and its two hundred and seventy lines brought to the author twelve guineas on the day on which it appeared. Lady Fullerton was surprised and delighted. All her long years of success, different indeed in degree, never effaced the memory of the joy."

of Longfellow's poems, but a compressed narrative of the story may be given.

The legend is founded on a popular tradition. Castel-Cuillé stands upon a bluff rock in the pretty valley of Saint-Amans, about a league from Agen. The castle was of considerable importance many centuries ago, while the English occupied Guienne; but it is now in ruins, though the village near it still exists. In a cottage, at the foot of the rock, lived the girl Marguerite, a soldier's daughter, with her brother Paul. The girl had been betrothed to her lover Baptiste; but during his absence she was attacked by virulent small-pox and lost her eyesight. Though her beauty had disappeared, her love remained. She waited long for her beloved Baptiste, but he never returned. He forsook his betrothed Marguerite, and plighted his troth to the fairer and richer Angele. It was, after all, only the old story.

Marguerite heard at night the song of their espousals on the eve of the marriage. She was in despair, but suppressed her grief. Wednesday morning arrived, the eve of St. Joseph. The bridal procession passed along the village towards the church of Saint-Amans, singing the bridal song. The fair and fertile valley was bedecked with the blossoms of the apple, the plum, and the almond, which whitened the country round. Nothing could have seemed more propitious. Then came the chorus, which was no invention of the poet, but a refrain always sung at rustic weddings, in accordance

with the custom of strewing the bridal path with flowers:

"The paths with buds and blossoms strow,
A lovely bride approaches nigh;
For all should bloom and spring anew,
A lovely bride is passing by!" *

Under the blue sky and brilliant sunshine, the joyous young people frisked along. The picture of youth, gaiety, and beauty, is full of truth and nature. The bride herself takes part in the frolic. With roguish eyes she escapes and cries: "Those who catch me will be married this year!" And then they descend the hill towards the church of Saint-Amans. Baptiste, the bridegroom, is out of spirits and mute. He takes no part in the sports of the bridal party. He remembers with grief the blind girl he has abandoned.

In the cottage under the cliff Marguerite meditates a tragedy. She dresses herself, and resolves to attend the wedding at Saint-Amans with her little brother. While dressing, she slips a knife into her bosom, and then they start for the church. The bridal party soon arrived, and Marguerite heard their entrance.

The ceremony proceeded. Mass was said. The

* The refrain, in the original Gascon, is as follows:

"Lás carrèros diouyon flouri,
Tan bèlo nobio bay sourti;
Diouyon flouri, diouyon graua,
Tan bèlo nobio bay passa!"

wedding-ring was blessed; and as Baptiste placed it on the bride's finger, he said the accustomed words. In a moment a voice cried: "It is he! It is he;" and Marguerite rushed through the bridal party towards him with a knife in her hand to stab herself; but before she could reach the bridegroom she fell down dead—broken-hearted! The crime which she had intended to commit against herself was thus prevented.

In the evening, in place of a bridal song, the De Profundis was chanted, and now each one seemed to say:—

"The roads shall mourn, and, vēiled in gloom,
So fair a corpse shall leave its home!
Should mourn and weep, ah, well-away,
So fair a corpse shall pass to-day!" *

This poem was finished in August 1835; and on the 26th of the same month it was publicly recited by Jasmin at Bordeaux, at the request of the Academy of that city.

There was great beauty, tenderness, and pathos in the poem. It was perfectly simple and natural. The poem might form the subject of a drama or a musical cantata. The lamentations of Marguerite on her blindness

* In Gascon:

"Lás carrèros diouyon gemi,
Tan bèlo morto bay sourti!
Diouyon gemi, diouyon ploura,
Tan bèlo morto bay passa!"

remind one of Milton's heart-rending words on the same subject:

> "For others, day and joy and light,
> For me, all darkness, always night."*

Sainte-Beuve, in criticising Jasmin's poems, says that "It was in 1835 that his talent raised itself to the eminence of writing one of his purest compositions—natural, touching and disinterested—his *Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé*, in which he makes us assist in a fête, amidst the joys of the villagers; and at the grief of a young girl, a fiancée whom a severe attack of small-pox had deprived of her eyesight, and whom her betrothed lover had abandoned to marry another.

"The grief of the poor abandoned girl, her changes of colour, her attitude, her conversation, her projects—the whole surrounded by the freshness of spring and the laughing brightness of the season—exhibits a character of nature and of truth which very few poets have been able to attain. One is quite surprised, on reading this simple picture, to be involuntarily carried back to the most expressive poems of the ancient Greeks—to Theocritus for example—for the Marguerite of Jasmin may be compared with the Simetha of the Greek poet. This is true poetry, rich from the same sources, and gilded with the same imagery. In his new compositions

* In Gascon:

"Jour per aoutres, toutjour! et per jou, malhurouzo,
Toutjour nèy, toutjour nèy!
Que fay negre lèn d'el! Oh! que moun amo ès tristo!"

Jasmin has followed his own bias; this man, who had few books, but meditated deeply in his heart and his love of nature; and he followed the way of true art with secret and persevering labour in what appeared to him the most eloquent, easy, and happy manner. . .

"His language," Sainte-Beuve continues, "is always the most natural, faithful, transparent, truthful, eloquent, and *sober;* never forget this last characteristic. He is never more happy than when he finds that he can borrow from an artizan or labourer one of those words which are worth ten of others. It is thus that his genius has refined during the years preceding the time in which he produced his greatest works. It is thus that he has become the poet of the people, writing in the popular patois, and for public solemnities, which remind one of those of the Middle Ages and of Greece; thus he finds himself to be, in short, more than any of our contemporaries, of the School of Horace, of Theocritus, or of Gray, and all the brilliant geniuses who have endeavoured by study to bring each of their works to perfection." *

*The Blind Girl* was the most remarkable work that Jasmin had up to this time composed. There is no country where an author is so popular, when he is once known, as in France. When Jasmin's poem was published he became, by universal consent, the Poet

* Sainte-Beuve: 'Causeries du Lundi,' iv. 240–1 (edit. 1852); and 'Portraits Contemporains,' ii. 61 (edit. 1847).

Laureate of the South. Yet some of the local journals of Bordeaux made light of his appearance in that city for the purpose of reciting his as yet unknown poem. "That a barber and hairdresser of Agen," they said, "speaking and writing in a vulgar tongue, should attempt to amuse or enlighten the intelligent people of Bordeaux, seemed to them beneath contempt."

But Jasmin soon showed them that genius is of no rank or condition of life; and their views shortly underwent a sudden change. His very appearance in the city was a triumph. Crowds resorted to the large hall, in which he was to recite his new poem of the *Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé.* The prefect, the mayor, the members of the Academy, and the most cultivated people of the city were present, and received him with applause.

There might have been some misgivings as to the success of the poem, but from the moment that he appeared on the platform and began his recitation, every doubt disappeared. He read the poem with marvellous eloquence; while his artistic figure, his mobile countenance, his dark-brown eyebrows, which he raised or lowered at will, his expressive gesticulation, and his passionate acting, added greatly to the effect of his recital, and soon won every heart. When he came to the refrain,

"The paths with buds and blossoms strew,"

he no longer declaimed, but sang after the manner of the peasants in their popular chaunt. His eyes

became suffused with tears, and those who listened to the patois, even though they only imperfectly understood it, partook of the impression, and wept also.

He was alike tender and impressive throughout the piece, especially at the death of the blind girl; and when he had ended, a storm of applause burst from the audience. There was a clapping of hands and a thunderous stamping of feet that shook the building almost to its foundations.

It was a remarkable spectacle, that a humble working man, comparatively uneducated, should have evoked the tumultuous applause of a brilliant assembly of intelligent ladies and gentlemen. It was indeed something extraordinary. Some said that he declaimed like Talma or Rachel, nor was there any note of dissonance in his reception. The enthusiasm was general and unanimous amongst the magistrates, clergy, scientific men, artists, physicians, ship-owners, men of business, and working people. They all joined in the applause when Jasmin had concluded his recitation.

From this time forward Jasmin was one of the most popular men at Bordeaux. He was entertained at a series of fêtes. He was invited to soirées by the prefect, by the archbishop, by the various social circles, as well as by the workmen's associations. They vied with each other for the honour of entertaining him. He went from matinées to soirées, and in ten days he appeared at thirty-four different entertainments.

At length he became thoroughly tired and exhausted

by this enormous fête-ing. He longed to be away and at home with his wife and children. He took leave of his friends and admirers with emotion, and, notwithstanding the praises and acclamations he had received at Bordeaux, he quietly turned to pursue his humble occupation at Agen.

It was one of the most remarkable things about Jasmin, that he was never carried off his feet by the brilliant ovations he received. Though enough to turn any poor fellow's head, he remained simple and natural to the last. As we say in this country, he could "carry corn." We have said that "Gascon" is often used in connection with boasting or gasconading. But the term was in no way applicable to Jasmin. He left the echo of praises behind him, and returned to Agen to enjoy the comforts of his fireside.

He was not, however, without tempters to wean him from his home and his ordinary pursuits. In 1836, the year after his triumphal reception at Bordeaux, some of his friends urged him to go to Paris—the centre of light and leading—in order to "make his fortune." But no! he had never contemplated the idea of leaving his native town. A rich wine merchant of Toulouse was one of his tempters. He advised Jasmin to go to the great metropolis, where genius alone was recognised. Jasmin answered him in a charming letter, setting forth the reasons which determined him to remain at home, principally because his tastes were modest and his desires were homely.

"You too," he said, "without regard to troubling my days and my nights, have written to ask me to carry my guitar and my dressing-comb to the great city of kings, because there, you say, my poetical humour and my well-known verses will bring torrents of crowns to my purse. Oh, you may well boast to me of this shower of gold and its clinking stream. You only make me cry: 'Honour is but smoke, glory is but glory, and money is only money!' I ask you, in no craven spirit, is money the only thing for a man to seek who feels in his heart the least spark of poetry? In my town, where everyone works, leave me as I am. Every summer, happier than a king, I lay up my small provision for the winter, and then I sing like a gold-finch under the shade of a poplar or an ash-tree, only too happy to grow grey in the land which gave me birth. One hears in summer the pleasant *zigo, ziou, ziou,* of the nimble grasshopper, or the young sparrow pluming his wings to make himself ready for flight, he knows not whither; but the wise man acts not so. I remain here in my home. Everything suits me—earth, sky, air—all that is necessary for my comfort. To sing of joyous poverty one must be joyful and poor. I am satisfied with my rye-bread, and the cool water from my fountain."

Jasmin remained faithful to these rules of conduct during his life. Though he afterwards made a visit to Paris, it was only for a short time; but his native town of Agen, his home on the Gravier, his shop, his wife and

his children, continued to be his little paradise. His muse soared over him like a guardian angel, giving him songs for his happiness and consolation for his sorrows. He was, above all things, happy in his wife. She cheered him, strengthened him, and consoled him. He thus portrayed her in one of his poems:

"Her eyes like sparkling stars of heavenly blue;
Her cheeks so sweet, so round, and rosy;
Her hair so bright, and brown, and curly;
Her mouth so like a ripened cherry;
Her teeth more brilliant than the snow."

Jasmin was attached to his wife, not only by her beauty, but by her good sense. She counselled and advised him in everything. He gave himself up to her wise advice, and never had occasion to regret it. It was with her modest marriage-portion that he was enabled to establish himself as a master hairdresser.

When he opened his shop, he set over the entrance door this sign: "*L'Art embellit La Nature: Jasmin, Coiffeur des Jeunes Gens.*" As his family grew, in order to increase his income, he added the words, "*Coiffeur des Dames.*" This proved to be a happy addition to his business. Most of the ladies of Agen strove for the honour of having their hair dressed by the poetical barber. While dressing their hair he delighted them with his songs. He had a sympathetic voice, which touched their souls and threw them into the sweetest of dreams.

Though Jasmin was always disposed to rhyme a little, his wise wife never allowed him to forget his regular daily work. At the same time she understood that his delicate nature could not be entirely absorbed by the labours of an ordinary workman. She was no longer jealous of his solitary communions with his muse; and after his usual hours of occupation, she left him, or sat by him, to enable him to pursue his dear reveries in quiet.

Mariette, or Marie, as she was usually called, was a thoroughly good partner for Jasmin. Though not by any means a highly educated woman, she felt the elevating effects of poetry even on herself. She influenced her husband's mind through her practical wisdom and good sense, while he in his turn influenced hers by elevating her soul and intellect.

Jasmin, while he was labouring over some song or verse, found it necessary to recite it to some one near him, but mostly to his wife. He wandered with her along the banks of the Garonne, and while he recited, she listened with bated breath. She could even venture to correct him; for she knew, better than he did, the ordinary Gascon dialect. She often found for him the true word for the picture which he desired to present to his reader. Though Jasmin was always thankful for her help, he did not abandon his own words without some little contention. He had worked out the subject in his mind, and any new word, or mode of description, might interrupt the beauty of the verses.

When he at length recognised the justice of her criticism, he would say, "Marie, you are right; and I will again think over the subject, and make it fit more completely into the Gascon idiom." In certain cases passages were suppressed; in others they were considerably altered.

When Jasmin, after much labour and correction, had finished his poem, he would call about him his intimate friends, and recite the poem to them. He had no objection to the most thorough criticism, by his wife as well as by his friends. When the poem was long and elaborate, the auditors sometimes began to yawn. Then the wife stepped in and said: "Jasmin, you must stop; leave the remainder of the poem for another day." Thus the recital ceased for the time.

The people of Agen entertained a lively sympathy for their poet. Even those who might to a certain extent depreciate his talent, did every justice to the nobility of his character. Perhaps some might envy the position of a man who had risen from the ranks and secured the esteem of men of fortune and even of the leaders of literary opinion. Jasmin, like every person envied or perhaps detracted, had his hours of depression. But the strong soul of his wife in these hours came to his relief, and assuaged the spirit of the man and the poet.

Jasmin was at one time on the point of abandoning verse-making. Yet he was encouraged to proceed by the demands which were made for his songs and verses. Indeed, no fête was considered complete without the

recitations of Jasmin. It was no doubt very flattering; yet fame has its drawbacks. His invitations were usually unceremonious.

Jasmin was no doubt recognised as a poet, and an excellent reciter; yet he was a person who handled the razor and the curling-tongs. When he was invited to a local party, it was merely that he might recite his verses gratuitously. He did not belong to their social circle, and his wife was not included. What sympathy could she have with these distinguished personages? At length Jasmin declined to go where his wife could not be invited. He preferred to stay at home with his family; and all further invitations of this sort were refused.

Besides, his friend Nodier had warned him that a poet of his stamp ought not to appear too often at the feasts of the lazy; that his time was too precious for that; that a poet ought, above all, not to occupy himself with politics, for, by so doing, he ran the risk of injuring his talent.

Some of his local critics, not having comprehended the inner life of Jasmin, compared his wife to the gardener of Boileau and the maid-servant of Molière. But the comparison did not at all apply. Jasmin had no gardener nor any old servant or housekeeper. Jasmin and Marie were quite different. They lived the same lives, and were all in all to each other. They were both of the people; and though she was without culture, and had not shared in the society of the

educated, she took every interest in the sentiments and the prosperity of her admirable husband.

One might ask, How did Jasmin acquire his eloquence of declamation—his power of attracting and moving assemblies of people in all ranks of life? It was the result, no doubt, partly of the gifts with which the Creator had endowed him, and partly also of patience and persevering study. He had a fine voice, and he managed it with such art that it became like a perfectly tuned instrument in the hands of a musician. His voice was powerful and pathetic by turns, and he possessed great sweetness of intonation,—combined with sympathetic feeling and special felicity of emphasis. And feeling is the vitalising principle of poetry. Jasmin occasionally varied his readings by singing or chaunting the songs which occurred in certain parts of his poems. This, together with his eloquence, gave such immense vital power to the recitations of the Agenaise bard.

And we shall find, from the next chapter, that Jasmin used his pathetic eloquence for very noble,—one might almost say, for divine purposes.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### JASMIN AS PHILANTHROPIST.

IT is now necessary to consider Jasmin in an altogether different character—that of a benefactor of his species. Self-sacrifice and devotion to others, forgetting self while spending and being spent for the good of one's fellow-creatures, exhibit man in his noblest characteristics. But who would have expected such virtues to be illustrated by a man like Jasmin, sprung from the humblest condition of life?

Charity may be regarded as a universal duty, which it is in every person's power to practise. Every kind of help given to another, on proper motives, is an act of charity; and there is scarcely any man in such a straitened condition as that he may not, on certain occasions, assist his neighbour. The widow that gives her mite to the treasury, the poor man that brings to the thirsty a cup of cold water, perform their acts of charity, though they may be of comparatively little moment. Wordsworth, in a poetic gem, described the virtue of charity:

"... Man is dear to man; the poorest poor
Long for some moments in a weary life

When they can know and feel that they have been,
Themselves, the fathers and the dealers out
Of some small blessings, have been kind to such
As needed kindness, for the single cause
That we have all of us one human heart."

This maxim of Wordsworth's truly describes the life and deeds of Jasmin. It may be said that he was first incited to exert himself on behalf of charity to his neighbours, by the absence of any Poor Law in France such as we have in England. In the cases of drought when the crops did not ripen; or in the phylloxera blights, when the grapes were ruined; or in the occasional disastrous floods, when the whole of the agricultural produce was swept away; the small farmers and labourers were reduced to great distress. The French peasant is usually very thrifty; but where accumulated savings were not available for relief, the result, in many cases, was widespread starvation.

Jasmin felt that, while himself living in the midst of blessings, he owed a duty, on such occasions, to the extreme necessities of his neighbours. The afflicted could not appeal to the administrators of local taxes; all that they could do was to appeal to the feelings of the benevolent, and rely upon local charity. He believed that the extremely poor should excite our liberality, the miserable our pity, the sick our assistance, the ignorant our instruction, and the fallen our helping hand.

It was under such circumstances that Jasmin con-

sented to recite his poems for the relief of the afflicted poor. His fame had increased from year to year. His songs were sung, and his poems were read, all over the South of France. When it was known that he was willing to recite his poems for charitable purposes, he was immediately assailed with invitations from far and near.

When bread fell short in winter-time, and the poor were famished; when an hospital for the needy was starving for want of funds; when a crèche or infants' asylum had to be founded; when a school, or an orphanage, had to be built or renovated, and money began to fail, an appeal was at once made to Jasmin's charitable feelings.

It was not then usual for men like Jasmin to recite their poems in public. Those who possessed his works might recite them for their own pleasure. But no one could declaim them better than he could, and his personal presence was therefore indispensable.

It is true, that about the same time Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray were giving readings from their works in England and America. Both readers were equally popular; but while they made a considerable addition to their fortunes,* Jasmin realised nothing for

* Mr. George Dolby, in his work 'Charles Dickens as I knew him,' tells "the story of the famous 'reading tours,' the most brilliantly successful enterprises that were ever undertaken." Chappell and Co. paid him £1500 for thirty readings in London and the provinces, by which they realised £5000. Arthur Smith and Mr.

himself; all that was collected at his recitations was given to the poor.

Of course, Jasmin was received with enthusiasm in those towns and cities which he visited for charitable purposes. When it was known that he was about to give one of his poetical recitals, the artisan left his shop, the blacksmith his smithy, the servant her household work; and the mother often shut up her house and went with her children to listen to the marvelous poet. Young girls spread flowers before his pathway; and lovely women tore flowers from their dresses to crown their beloved minstrel with their offerings.

Since his appearance at Bordeaux, in 1835, when he recited his *Blind Girl* for a charitable purpose, he had been invited to many meetings in the neighbourhood of Agen, wherever any worthy institution had to be erected or assisted. He continued to write occasional verses, though not of any moment, for he was still dreaming of another masterpiece.

All further thoughts of poetical composition were, however, dispelled, by the threatened famine in the Lot-et-Garonne. In the winter of 1837 bread became very dear in the South of France. The poor people were suffering greatly, and the usual appeal was made

Headland were his next managers, and finally Mr. George Dolby. The latter says that Mr. Dickens computed the money he netted under the Smith and Headland management at about £12,000; and under Dolby's management "he cleared nearly £33,000."

to Jasmin to come to their help. A concert was advertised to be given at Tonneins, a considerable town to the north-west of Agen, when the local musicians were to give their services, and Jasmin was to recite a poem.

For this purpose he composed his 'Charity' (*La Caritat*). It was addressed to the ladies and musicians who assisted at the entertainment. *Charity* is a short lyrical effusion, not so much a finished poem as the utterings of a tender heart. Though of some merit, it looks pale beside *The Blind Girl*. But his choice of the subject proved a forecast of the noble uses which Jasmin was afterwards enabled to make of his poetical talents.

Man, he said in his verses, is truly great, chiefly through his charity. The compassionate man, doing his works of benevolence, though in secret, in a measure resembles the Divine Author of his being. The following is the introductory passage of the poem:—

"As we behold at sea great ships of voyagers
Glide o'er the waves to billows white with spray,
And to another world the hardy travellers convey;
Just as bold savants travel through the sky
To illustrate the world which they espy,
Men without ceasing cry, 'How great is man!'
But no! Great God! How infinitely little he!
Has he a genius? 'Tis nothing without goodness!
Without some grace, no grandeur do we rate.

It is the tender-hearted who show charity in kindness.

Unseen of men, he hides his gift from sight,
He does all that he owes in silent good,
Like the poor widow's mite;
Yet both are great,
Great above all—great as the Grace of God."

This is, of course, a very feeble attempt to render the words of Jasmin. He was most pathetic when he recounted the sorrows of the poor. While doing so, he avoided exciting their lower instincts. He disavowed all envy of the goods of others. He maintained respect for the law, while at the same time he exhorted the rich to have regard for their poorer brethren. "It is the glory of the people," he said at a meeting of workmen, "to protect themselves from evil, and to preserve throughout their purity of character."

This was the spirit in which Jasmin laboured. He wrote some other poems in a similar strain—'The Rich and Poor,' 'The Poor Man's Doctor,' 'The Rich Benefactor' (*Lou Boun Riche*); but Jasmin's own *Charity* contained the germ of them all. He put his own soul into his poems. At Tonneins, the emotion he excited by his reading of *Charity* was very great, and the subscriptions for the afflicted poor were correspondingly large.

The municipality never forgot the occasion; and whenever they became embarrassed by the poverty of

the people, they invariably appealed to Jasmin, and always with the same success. On one occasion the Mayor wrote to him: "We are still under the charm of your verses; and I address you in the name of the poor people of Tonneins, to thank you most gratefully for the charitable act you have done for their benefit. The evening you appeared here, sir, will long survive in our memory. It excited everywhere the most lively gratitude. The poor enjoyed a day of happiness, and the rich enjoyed a day of pleasure, for nothing can be more blessed than Charity!"

Jasmin, in replying to this letter, said: "Christ's words were, 'Ye have the poor always with you'; in pronouncing this fact, he called the world to deeds of charity, and instituted this admirable joint responsibility (*solidarité*), in virtue of which each man should fulfil the duty of helping his poorer neighbours. It is this responsibility which, when the cry of hunger or suffering is heard, is most instrumental in bringing all generous souls to the front, in order to create and multiply the resources of the poor."

Jasmin's success at Tonneins led to numerous invitations of a like character. "Come over and help us," was the general cry during that winter of famine. The barber's shop was invaded by numerous deputations; and the postman was constantly delivering letters of invitation at his door. He was no longer master of his time, and had considerable difficulty in attending to his own proper business. Sometimes his leisure hours

were appropriated six months beforehand; and he was often peremptorily called upon to proceed with his philanthropic work.

When he could find time enough to spare from his business, he would consent to give another recitation. When the distance was not great he walked, partly for exercise, and partly to save money. There were few railways in those days, and hiring a conveyance was an expensive affair. Besides, his desire always was, to hand over, if possible, the whole of the receipts to the charitable institutions for whose benefit he gave his recitations.

The wayfaring poet, on his approach to the town in which he was to appear, was usually met by crowds of people. They received him with joy and acclamation. The magistrates presented him with a congratulatory address. Deputations from neighbouring towns were present at the celebration. At the entrance to the town Jasmin often passed under a triumphal arch, with "Welcome, Jasmin! our native poet!" inscribed upon it. He was conveyed, headed by the local band, to the hall where he was to give his recitation.

Jasmin's appearance at Bergerac was a great event. Bergerac is a town of considerable importance, containing about fourteen thousand inhabitants, situated on the right or north bank of the river Dordogne. But during that terrible winter the poor people of Bergerac were in great distress, and Jasmin was summoned to their help. The place was at too great a distance from

Agen for him to walk thither, and accordingly he was obliged to take a conveyance. He was as usual met by a multitude of people, who escorted him into the town.

The magistrates could not find a place sufficiently large to give accommodation to the large number of persons who desired to hear him. At length they found a large building which had been used as a barn; and there they raised a platform for the poet. The place was at once filled, and those who could not get admission crowded about the entrance. Some of the people raised ladders against the walls of the building, and clambered in at the windows. Groups of auditors were seen at every place where they could find a footing. Unfortunately the weather was rainy, and a crowd of women filled the surrounding meadow, sheltered by their umbrellas.

More than five hundred persons had not been able to find admission, and it was therefore necessary for Jasmin to give several more readings to satisfy the general enthusiasm. All the receipts were given over by Jasmin for the benefit of the poor, and the poet hurried home at once to his shaving and hair-dressing.

On another occasion, at Gontaud, the weather was more satisfactory. The day was fine and sunny, and the ground was covered with flowers. About the time that Jasmin was expected, an open carriage, festooned with flowers, and drawn by four horses, was sent to the gate of the town, escorted by the municipal council, to

wait for the poet. When he arrived on foot—for the place was at no great distance from Agen—twelve young girls, clothed in white, offered him a bouquet of flowers, and presented him with an address. He then entered the carriage and proceeded to the place where he was to give his recitation. All went well and happily, and a large offering was collected and distributed amongst the poor.

Then at Damazan, where he gave another reading for the same purpose, after he had entered the carriage which was to convey him to the place of entertainment, a number of girls preceded the carriage in which the poet sat, and scattered flowers in his way, singing a refrain of the country adapted to the occasion. It resembled the refrain sung before the bride in *The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé*:

"The paths with flowers bestrew,
So great a poet comes this way;
For all should flower and bloom anew,
So great a poet comes to-day." *

These are only specimens of the way in which Jasmin was received during his missions of philanthropy. He went from north to south, from east to west, by river and by road, sleeping where he could, but always happy

* In Gascon:

"Las carrèros diouyon fleuri,
Tan gran poete bay sourti;
Diouyon fleuri, diouyon graua,
Tan gran poete bay passa."

and cheerful, doing his noble work with a full and joyous heart. He chirruped and sang from time to time as if his mouth was full of nightingales. And he was never without enthusiastic multitudes to listen to his recitals, and to share their means with the poor and afflicted. We might fill this little story with a detailed account of his journeyings; but a summary account is all that is at present necessary. We shall afterwards return to the subject.

## CHAPTER IX.

### JASMIN'S 'FRANCONNETTE.'

JASMIN published no further poems for three or four years. His time was taken up with his trade and his philanthropic missions. Besides, he did not compose with rapidity; he elaborated his poems by degrees; he arranged the plot of his story, and then he clothed it with poetical words and images. While he walked and journeyed from place to place, he was dreaming and thinking of his next dramatic poem—his *Franconnette,* which many of his Parisian critics regard as his masterpiece.

Like most of his previous poems, Jasmin wrote *Franconnette* in the Gascon dialect. Some of his intimate friends continued to expostulate with him for using this almost dead and virtually illiterate patois. Why not write in classical French? M. Dumon, his colleague at the Academy of Agen, again urged him to employ the national language, which all intelligent readers could understand.

"Under the reign of our Henry IV.," said M. Dumon, "the Langue d'Oïl became, with modifications, the language of the French, while the Langue d'Oc remained

merely a patois. Do not therefore sing in the dialect of the past, but in the language of the present, like Béranger, Lamartine, and Victor Hugo.

"What," asked M. Dumon, "will be the fate of your original poetry? It will live, no doubt, like the dialect in which it is written; but is this, the Gascon patois, likely to live? Will it be spoken by our posterity as long as it has been spoken by our ancestors? I hope not; at least I wish it may be less spoken. Yet I love its artless and picturesque expressions, its lively recollections of customs and manners which have long ceased to exist, like those old ruins which still embellish our landscape. But the tendency which is gradually effacing the vestiges of our old language and customs is but the tendency of civilisation itself.

"When Rome fell under the blows of the barbarians, she was entirely conquered; her laws were subjected at the same time as her armies. The conquest dismembered her idiom as well as her empire. . . . The last trace of national unity disappeared in this country after the Roman occupation. It had been Gaul, but now it became France. The force of centralisation which has civilised Europe, covering this immense chaos, has brought to light, after more than a hundred years, this most magnificent creation—the French monarchy and the French language. Let us lament, if you will, that the poetical imagination and the characteristic language of our ancestors have not left a more

profound impression. But the sentence is pronounced; even our Henry IV. could not change it. Under his reign the Langue d'Oïl became for ever the French language, and the Langue d'Oc remained but a patois.

"Popular poet as you are, you sing to posterity in the language of the past. This language, which you recite so well, you have restored and perhaps even created; yet you do not feel that it is the national language; this powerful instrument of a new era, which invades and besieges yours on all sides like the last fortress of an obsolete civilisation."

Jasmin was cut to the quick by this severe letter of his friend, and he lost not a moment in publishing a defence of the language condemned to death by his opponent. He even displayed the force and harmony of the language which had been denounced by M. Dumon as a patois. He endeavoured to express himself in the most characteristic and poetical style, as evidence of the vitality of his native Gascon. He compared it to a widowed mother who dies, and also to a mother who does not die, but continues young, lovely, and alert, even to the last. Dumon had published his protest on the 28th of August, 1837, and a few days later, on the 2nd of September, Jasmin replied in the following poem:—

"There's not a deeper grief to man
Than when his mother, faint with years,
Decrepit, old, and weak and wan,
Beyond the leech's art appears;

When by her couch her son may stay,
And press her hand, and watch her eyes,
And feel, though she revives to-day,
Perchance his hope to-morrow dies.

It is not thus, believe me, sir,
With this enchantress—she will call
Our second mother: Frenchmen err,
Who, cent'ries since, proclaimed her fall!
Our mother-tongue—all melody—
While music lives can never die.

Yes! she still lives, her words still ring;
Her children yet her carols sing;
And thousand years may roll away
Before her magic notes decay.

The people love their ancient songs, and will
While yet a people, love and keep them still:
These lays are as their mother; they recall
Fond thoughts of mother, sister, friends, and all
The many little things that please the heart,
The dreams, the hopes, from which we cannot part.
These songs are as sweet waters, where we find
Health in the sparkling wave that nerves the mind.
In ev'ry home, at ev'ry cottage door,
By ev'ry fireside, when our toil is o'er,
These songs are round us—near our cradles sigh,
And to the grave attend us when we die.

Oh, think, cold critics! 'twill be late and long,
Ere time shall sweep away this flood of song!
There are who bid this music sound no more,
And you can hear them, nor defend—deplore!
You, who were born where its first daisies grew,
Have fed upon its honey, sipp'd its dew,

Slept in its arms, and wakened to its kiss,
Danced to its sounds, and warbled to its tone—
You can forsake it in an hour like this!
Yes, weary of its age, renounce—disown—
And blame one minstrel who is true—alone!" *

This is but a paraphrase of Jasmin's poem, which, as we have already said, cannot be verbally translated into any other language. Even the last editor of Jasmin's poems—Boyer d'Agen—does not translate them into French poetry, but into French prose. Much of the aroma of poetry evaporates in converting poetical thoughts from one language into another.

Jasmin, in one part of his poem, compares the ancient patois to one of the grand old elms in the Promenade de Gravier, which, having in a storm had some of its branches torn away, was ordered by the local authorities to be rooted up. The labourers worked away, but their pick-axes became unhafted. They could not up-root the tree; they grew tired and forsook the work. When the summer came, glorious verdure again clothed the remaining boughs; the birds sang sweetly in the branches, and the neighbours rejoiced that its roots had been so numerous and the tree had been so firmly planted.

Jasmin's description of his mother-tongue is most touching. Seasons pass away, and, as they roll on,

* The whole of Jasmin's answer to M. Dumon will be found in the Appendix at the end of this volume.

their echoes sound in our ears; but the loved tongue shall not and must not die. The mother-tongue recalls our own dear mother, sisters, friends, and crowds of bygone associations, which press into our minds while sitting by the evening fire. This tongue is the language of our toils and labours; she comes to us at our birth, she lingers at our tomb.

"No, no—I cannot desert my mother-tongue!" said Jasmin. "It preserves the folk-lore of the district; it is the language of the poor, of the labourer, the shepherd, the farmer and grape-gatherers, of boys and girls, of brides and bridegrooms. The people," he said to M. Dumon, "love to hear my songs in their native dialect. You have enough poetry in classical French; leave me to please my compatriots in the dialect which they love. I cannot give up this harmonious language, our second mother, even though it has been condemned for three hundred years. Why! she still lives, her voice still sounds; like her, the seasons pass, the bells ring out their peals, and though a hundred thousand years may roll away, they will still be sounding and ringing!"

Jasmin has been compared to Dante. But there is this immense difference between them. Dante was virtually the creator of the Italian language, which was in its infancy when he wrote his 'Divine Comedy' some six hundred years ago, while Jasmin was merely reviving a gradually-expiring dialect. Drouilhet de Sigalas has said that Dante lived at the sunrise of his

language, while Jasmin lived at its sunset. Indeed, Gascon was not a written language, and Jasmin had to collect his lexicon, grammar, and speech mostly from the peasants who lived in the neighbourhood of Agen. Dante virtually created the Italian language, while Jasmin merely resuscitated for a time the Gascon dialect.

Jasmin was not deterred by the expostulations of Dumon, but again wrote his new epic of *Franconnette* in Gascon. It took him a long time to clothe his poetical thoughts in words. Nearly five years had elapsed since he recited *The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé* to the citizens of Bordeaux; since then he had written a few poetical themes, but he was mainly thinking and dreaming, and at times writing down his new epic *Franconnette*. It was completed in 1840, when he dedicated the poem to the city of Toulouse.

The story embodied in the poem was founded on an ancient tradition. The time at which it occurred was towards the end of the sixteenth century, when France was torn to pieces by the civil war between the Huguenots and the Catholics. Agen was then a centre of Protestantism. It was taken and retaken by both parties again and again. The Huguenot captain, Truelle, occupied the town in April 1562; but Blaize de Montluc, "a fierce Catholic," as he is termed by M. Paul Joanne, assailed the town with a strong force and recaptured it. On entering the place, Montluc found that the inhabitants had fled with the garrison, and "the terrible chief was greatly disappointed at not

finding any person in Agen to slaughter." * Montluc struck with a heavy hand the Protestants of the South. In the name of the God of Mercy he hewed the Huguenots to pieces, and, after spreading desolation through the South, he retired to his fortress at Estellac, knelt before the altar, took the communion, and was welcomed by his party as one of the greatest friends of the Church.

The civil war went on for ten years, until in August 1572 the massacre of Saint Bartholomew took place. After that event the word "Huguenot" was abolished, or was only mentioned with terror. Montluc's castle of Estellac, situated near the pretty village of Estanquet, near Roquefort—famous for its cheese—still exists; his cabinet is preserved, and his tomb and statue are to be seen in the adjoining garden. The principal scenes of the following story are supposed to have occurred at Estanquet, a few miles to the south of Agen.

*Franconnette,* like *The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé,* is a story of rivalry in love; but, though more full of adventure, it ends more happily. Franconnette was a village beauty. Her brilliant eyes, her rosy complexion, her cherry lips, her lithe and handsome figure, brought all the young fellows of the neighbourhood to her feet. Her father was a banished Huguenot, but beauty of person sets differences of belief at defiance.

* 'Gascogne et Languedoc,' par Paul Joanne, p. 95 (edit. 1883).

The village lads praised her and tried to win her affections; but, like beauties in general, surrounded by admirers, she was a bit of a flirt.

At length two rivals appeared—one Marcel, a soldier under Montluc, favoured by Franconnette's grandmother, and Pascal, the village blacksmith, favoured by the girl herself. One Sunday afternoon a number of young men and maidens assembled at the foot of Montluc's castle of Estellac on the votive festival of St. Jacques at Roquefort. Franconnette was there, as well as Marcel and Pascal, her special admirers. Dancing began to the music of the fife; but Pascal, the handsomest of the young men, seemed to avoid the village beauty. Franconnette was indignant at his neglect, but was anxious to secure his attention and devotion. She danced away, sliding, whirling, and pirouetting. What would not the admiring youths have given to impress two kisses on her lovely cheek! *

In these village dances, it is the custom for the young men to kiss their partners, if they can tire them out; but in some cases, when the girl is strong and an

* The dance still exists in the neighbourhood of Agen. When there a few years ago, I was drawn by the sound of a fife and a drum to the spot where a dance of this sort was going on. It was beyond the suspension bridge over the Garonne, a little to the south of Agen. A number of men and women of the working-class were assembled on the grassy sward, and were dancing, whirling, and pirouetting to their hearts' content. Sometimes the girls bounded from the circle, were followed by their sweethearts, and kissed. It reminded one of the dance so vigorously depicted by Jasmin in *Franconnette*.

accomplished dancer, she declines to be tired until she wishes to cease dancing. First one youth danced with Franconnette, then another; but she tired them all. Then came Marcel, the soldier, wearing his sabre, with a cockade in his cap—a tall and stately fellow, determined to win the reward. But he too, after much whirling and dancing, was at last tired out: he was about to fall with dizziness, and then gave in. On goes the dance; Franconnette waits for another partner; Pascal springs to her side, and takes her round the waist. Before they had made a dozen steps, the girl smiles and stops, and turns her blushing cheeks to receive her partner's willing kisses.

Marcel started up in a rage, and drawing himself to his full height, he strode to Pascal. "Peasant!" he said, "thou hast supplied my place too quickly," and then dealt him a thundering blow between the eyes. Pascal was not felled; he raised his arm, and his fist descended on Marcel's head like a bolt. The soldier attempted to draw his sabre. When Pascal saw this, he closed with Marcel, grasped him in his arms, and dashed him to the ground, crushed and senseless.

Marcel was about to rise to renew the duel, when suddenly Montluc, who happened to be passing with the Baron of Roquefort, stepped forward and sternly ordered the combatants to separate.

This terrible encounter put an end to the fête. The girls fled like frightened doves. The young men escorted Pascal to his home preceded by the fifers.

Marcel was not discouraged. On recovering his speech, he stammered out, grinding his teeth: "They shall pay dearly for this jesting; Franconnette shall have no other husband than myself."

Many months passed. The harvest was gathered in. There were no more out-door fêtes or dances. The villagers of Estanquet assembled round their firesides. Christmas arrived with it games and carol-singing. Then came the Feast of Lovers, called the Buscou,* on the last day of the year, where, in a large chamber, some hundred distaffs were turning, and boys and girls, with nimble fingers, were winding thread of the finest flax. Franconnette was there, and appointed queen of the games. After the winding was over, the songs and dances began to the music of a tambourin. The queen, admired by all, sang and danced like the rest.

Pascal was not there; his mother was poor, and she endeavoured to persuade him to remain at home and work. After a short struggle with himself, Pascal yielded. He turned aside to his forge in silent

* Miss Harriet Preston, of Boston, U.S., published part of a translation of *Franconnette* in the 'Atlantic Monthly' for February, 1876, and adds the following note: "The *buscou*, or busking, was a kind of *bee*, at which the young people assembled, bringing the thread of their late spinning, which was divided into skeins of the proper size by a broad and thin plate of steel or whalebone called a *busc*. The same thing, under precisely the same name, figured in the toilets of our grandmothers, and hence, probably, the Scotch use of the verb to *busk*, or attire."

dejection; and soon the anvil was ringing and the sparks were flying, while away down in the village the busking went merrily on. "If the prettiest were always the most sensible," says Jasmin, "how much my Franconnette might have accomplished;" but instead of this, she flitted from place to place, idle and gay, jesting, singing, dancing, and, as usual, bewitching all.

Then Thomas, Pascal's friend, asked leave to sing a few verses; and, fixing his keen eyes upon the coquette, he began in tones of lute-like sweetness the following song, entitled 'The Syren with a Heart of Ice.' We have translated it, as nearly as possible, from the Gascon dialect.

"Faribolo pastouro,
Serèno al cò de glas,
Oh! digo, digo couro
Entendren tinda l'houro
Oun t'amistouzaras.
Toutjour faribouleje,
Et quand parpailloulejes
La foulo que mestrejes,
Sur toun cami set mèt
Et te sièt.
Mais rés d'acos, maynâdo,
Al bounhur pot mena;
Qu'és acòs d'estre aymado,
Quand on sat pas ayma?"

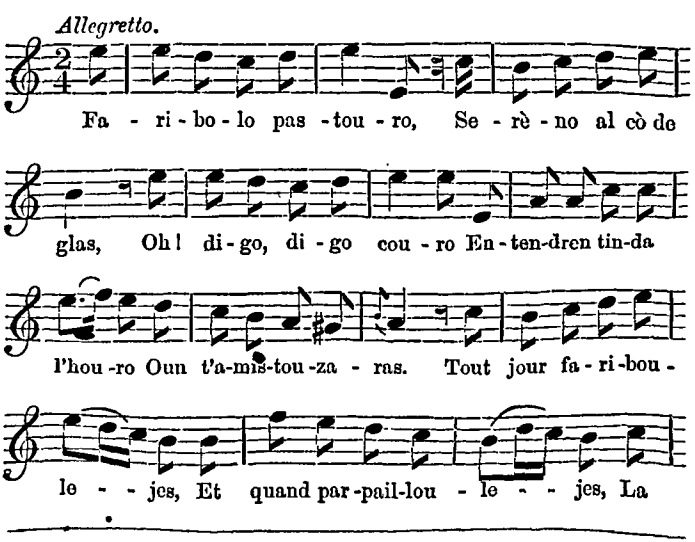
"Wayward shepherd maid,
Syren with heart of ice,
Oh! tell us, tell us! when
We listen for the hour
When thou shalt feel
Ever so free and gay,
And when you flutter o'er
The number you subdue,
Upon thy path they fall
At thy feet.
But nothing comes of this, young maid,
To happiness it never leads;
What is it to be loved like this
If you ne'er can love again?"

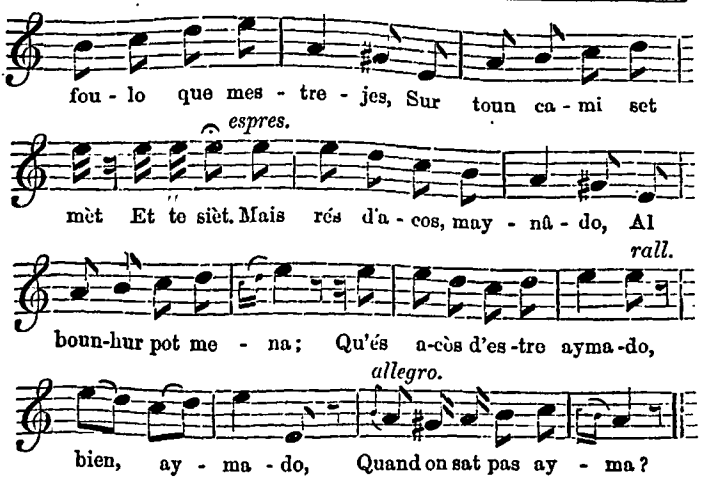
Such poetry however defies translation. The more exquisite the mastery of a writer over his own language, the more difficult it is to reproduce it in another. But the spirit of the song is in Miss Costello's translation,* as given in *Franconnette* at the close of this volume.

When reciting *Franconnette,* Jasmin usually sang 'The Syren' to music of his own composition. We accordingly annex his music.

## SERÈNO AL CÒ DE GLAS.

PAROLES ET MUSIQUE DE JASMIN.


Allegretto.
Fa - ri - bo - lo pas - tou - ro, Se - rè - no al cò de
glas, Oh! di - go, di - go cou - ro En - ten - dren tin - da
l'hou - ro Oun t'a - mis - tou - za - ras. Tout jour fa - ri - bou -
le - - - jes, Et quand par - pail - lou - le - - - jes, La

* Miss Louisa Stuart Costello in 'Bearn and the Pyrenees.'

fou - lo que mes - tre - jes, Sur toun ca - mi set
espres.
mèt Et te sièt. Mais rés d'a - cos, may - nâ - do, Al
rall.
boun-hur pot me - na; Qu'és a-còs d'es-tre ayma-do,
allegro.
bien, ay - ma - do, Quand on sat pas ay - ma?

All were transported with admiration at the beautiful song. When Thomas had finished, loud shouts were raised for the name of the poet. "Who had composed this beautiful lay?" "It is Pascal," replied Thomas. "Bravo, Pascal! Long live Pascal!" was the cry of the young people. Franconnette was unwontedly touched by the song. "But where is Pascal?" she said. "If he loves, why does he not appear?" "Oh," said Laurent, another of his rivals, in a jealous and piqued tone, "he is too poor, he is obliged to stay at home, his father is so infirm that he lives upon alms!" "You lie," cried Thomas. "Pascal is unfortunate; he has been six months ill from the wounds he received in defence of Franconnette, and now his family is dependent upon him; but he has industry and courage, and will soon recover from his misfortunes."

Franconnette remained quiet, concealing her emotions. Then the games began. They played at *Cache Coutcau* or Hunt the Slipper. Dancing came next; Franconnette was challenged by Laurent, and after many rounds the girl was tired, and Laurent claimed the kisses that she had forfeited. Franconnette flew away like a bird; Laurent ran after her, caught her, and was claiming the customary forfeit, when, struggling to free herself, Laurent slipped upon the floor, fell heavily, and broke his arm.

Franconnette was again unfortunate. Ill-luck seems to have pursued the girl. The games came to an end, and the young people were about to disperse when, at this unlucky moment, the door was burst open and a sombre apparition appeared. It was the Black Forest sorcerer, the supposed warlock of the neighbourhood. "Unthinking creatures," he said, "I have come from my gloomy rocks up yonder to open your eyes. You all adore this Franconnette. Behold, she is accursed! While in her cradle her father, the Huguenot, sold her to the devil. He has punished Pascal and Laurent for the light embrace she gave them. Be warned in time and avoid her. The demon alone has a claim to her."

The sorcerer ended; sparks of fire surrounded him, and after turning four times round in a circle he suddenly disappeared! Franconnette's friends at once held aloof from her. They called out to her, "Begone!" All in a maze the girl shuddered and sickened; she became senseless, and fell down on the floor in a swoon.

The young people fled, leaving her helpless. And thus ended the second fête which began so gaily.

The grossest superstition then prevailed in France, as everywhere. Witches and warlocks were thoroughly believed in, far more so than belief in God and His Son. The news spread abroad that the girl was accursed and sold to the Evil One, and she was avoided by everybody. She felt herself doomed. At length she reached her grandmother's house, but she could not work, she could scarcely stand. The once radiant Franconnette could neither play nor sing; she could only weep.

Thus ended two cantos of the poem. The third opens with a lovely picture of a cottage by a leafy brookside in the hamlet of Estanquet. The spring brought out the singing-birds to pair and build their nests. They listened, but could no longer hear the music which, in former years, had been almost sweeter than their own. The nightingales, more curious than the rest, flew into the maid's garden; they saw her straw hat on a bench, a rake and watering-pot among the neglected jonquils, and the rose branches running riot. Peering yet further and peeping into the cottage door, the curious birds discovered an old woman asleep in her arm-chair, and a pale, quiet girl beside her, dropping tears upon her lily hands. "Yes, yes, it is Franconnette," says the poet. "You will have guessed that already. A poor girl, weeping in solitude, the daughter of a Huguenot, banned by the Church and sold to the devil! Could anything be more frightful?"

Nevertheless her grandmother said to her, "My child, it is not true; the sorcerer's charge is false. Be of good cheer, you are more lovely than ever." One gleam of hope had come to Franconnette; she hears that Pascal has defended her everywhere, and boldly declared her to be the victim of a brutal plot. She now realised how great was his goodness, and her proud spirit was softened even to tears. The grandmother put in a good word for Marcel, but the girl turned aside. Then the old woman said, "To-morrow is Easter Day; go to Mass, pray as you never prayed before, and take the blessed bread, proving that you are numbered with His children for ever."

The girl consented, and went to the Church of Saint Peter on Easter morning. She knelt, with her chaplet of beads, among the rest, imploring Heaven's mercy. But she knelt alone in the midst of a wide circle. All the communicants avoided her. The churchwarden, Marcel's uncle, in his long-tailed coat, with a pompous step, passed her entirely by, and refused her the heavenly meal. Pascal was there and came to her help. He went forward to the churchwarden and took from the silver plate the crown piece* of the holy element covered with flowers, and took and presented two

* A custom which then existed in certain parts of France. It was taken by the French emigrants to Canada, where it existed not long ago. The crown of the sacramental bread used to be reserved for the family of the *seigneur* or other communicants of distinction.

pieces of the holy bread to Franconnette—one for herself, the other for her grandmother.

From that moment she begins to live a new life, and to understand the magic of love. She carries home the blessed bread to the ancient dame, and retires to her chamber to give herself up, with the utmost gratefulness, to the rapturous delight of loving. "Ah," says Jasmin in his poem, "the sorrowing heart aye loveth best!"

Yet still she remembers the fatal doom of the sorcerer —that she is sold for a price to the demon. All seem to believe the hideous tale, and no one takes her part save Pascal and her grandmother. She kneels before her little shrine and prays to the Holy Virgin for help and succour.

At the next fête day she repaired to the church of Notre Dame de bon Encontre,* where the inhabitants of half a dozen of the neighbouring villages had assembled, with priests and crucifixes, garlands and tapers, banners and angels. The latter, girls about to be confirmed, walked in procession and sang the Angelus at the appropriate hours. The report had spread abroad that Franconnette would entreat the Blessed Virgin to save her from the demon. The strangers were more kind to her than her immediate neighbours, and from many a pitying heart the prayer went up that a miracle might

* A church in the suburbs of Agen, celebrated for its legends and miracles, to which numerous pilgrimages are made in the month of May.

be wrought in favour of the beautiful maiden. She felt their sympathy, and it gave her confidence. The special suppliants passed up to the altar one by one—anxious mothers, disappointed lovers, orphans and children. They kneel, they ask for blessings, they present their candles for the old priest to bless, and then they retire.

Now came the turn of Franconnette. Pascal was in sight and prayed for her success. She went forward in a happy frame of mind, with her taper and a bouquet of flowers. She knelt before the priest. He took the sacred image and presented it to her; but scarcely had it touched the lips of the orphan when a terrible peal of thunder rent the heavens, and a bolt of lightning struck the spire of the church, extinguishing her taper as well as the altar lights. This was a most unlucky coincidence for the terrified girl; and, cowering like a lost soul, she crept out of the church. The people were in consternation. "It was all true, she was now sold to the devil! Put her to death, that is the only way of ending our misfortunes!"

The truth is that the storm of thunder and lightning prevailed throughout the neighbourhood. It is a common thing in southern climes. The storm which broke out at Notre Dame destroyed the belfry; the church of Roquefort was demolished by a bolt of lightning, the spire of Saint Pierre was ruined. The storm was followed by a tempest of hail and rain. Agen was engulfed by the waters; her bridge was

destroyed,* and many of the neighbouring vineyards were devastated. And all this ruin was laid at the door of poor Franconnette!

The neighbours—her worst enemies—determined to burn the daughter of the Huguenot out of her cottage. The grandmother first heard the cries of the villagers: "Fire them, let them both burn together." Franconnette rushed to the door and pleaded for mercy. "Go back," cried the crowd, "you must both roast together." They set fire to the rick outside and then proceeded to fire the thatch of the cottage. "Hold, hold!" cried a stern voice, and Pascal rushed in amongst them. "Cowards! would you murder two defenceless women? Tigers that you are, would you fire and burn them in their dwelling?"

Marcel too appeared; he had not yet given up the hope of winning Franconnette's love. He now joined Pascal in defending her and the old dame, and being

* A long time ago the inhabitants of the town of Agen communicated with the other side of the Garonne by means of little boats. The first wooden bridge was commenced when Aquitaine was governed by the English, in the reign of Richard Cœur-de-Lion, at the end of the twelfth century. The bridge was destroyed and repaired many times, and one of the piles on which the bridge was built is still to be seen. It is attributed to Napoleon I. that he caused the first bridge of stone to be erected, for the purpose of facilitating the passage of his troops to Spain. The work was, however, abandoned during his reign, and it was not until the Restoration that the bridge was completed. Since that time other bridges, especially the suspension bridge, have been erected, to enable the inhabitants of the towns on the Garonne to communicate freely with each other.

a soldier of Montluc, he was a powerful man in the neighbourhood. The girl was again asked to choose between the two. At last, after refusing any marriage under present circumstances, she clung to Pascal. "I would have died alone," she said, "but since you will have it so, I resist no longer. It is our fate; we will die together." Pascal was willing to die with her, and turning to Marcel he said: "I have been more fortunate than you, but you are a brave man and you will forgive me. I have no friend, but will you act as a squire and see me to my grave?" After struggling with his feelings, Marcel at last said: "Since it is her wish, I will be your friend."

A fortnight later, the marriage between the unhappy lovers took place. Every one foreboded disaster. The wedding procession went down the green hill towards the church of Notre Dame. There was no singing, no dancing, no merriment, as was usual on such occasions. The rustics shuddered at heart over the doom of Pascal. The soldier Marcel marched at the head of the wedding-party. At the church an old woman appeared, Pascal's mother. She flung her arms about him and adjured him to fly from his false bride, for his marriage would doom him to death. She even fell at the feet of her son and said that he should pass over her body rather than be married. Pascal turned to Marcel and said: "Love overpowers me! If I die, will you take care of my mother?"

Then the gallant soldier dispelled the gloom which

had overshadowed the union of the loving pair. "I can do no more," he said; "your mother has conquered me. Franconnette is good, and pure, and true. I loved the maid, Pascal, and would have shed my blood for her, but she loved you instead of me.

"Know that she is not sold to the Evil One. In my despair I hired the sorcerer to frighten you with his mischievous tale, and chance did the rest. When we both demanded her, she confessed her love for you. It was more than I could bear, and I resolved that we should both die.

"But your mother has disarmed me; she reminds me of my own. Live, Pascal, for your wife and your mother! You need have no more fear of me. It is better that I should die the death of a soldier than with a crime upon my conscience."

Thus saying, he vanished from the crowd, who burst into cheers. The happy lovers fell into each other's arms. "And now," said Jasmin, in concluding his poem, "I must lay aside my pencil. I had colours for sorrow; I have none for such happiness as theirs!"

## CHAPTER X.

### JASMIN AT TOULOUSE.

It had hitherto been the custom of Jasmin to dedicate his poems to one of his friends; but in the case of *Franconnette* he dedicated the poem to the city of Toulouse. His object in making the dedication was to express his gratitude for the banquet given to him in 1836 by the leading men of the city, at which the President had given the toast of "Jasmin, the adopted son of Toulouse."

Toulouse was the most wealthy and prosperous city in the South of France. Among its citizens were many men of literature, art, and science. Jasmin was at first disposed to dedicate *Franconnette* to the city of Bordeaux, where he had been so graciously received and fêted on the recitation of his *Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé*; but he eventually decided to dedicate the new poem to the city of Toulouse, where he had already achieved a considerable reputation.

Jasmin was received with every honour by the city which had adopted him. It was his intention to read the poem at Toulouse before its publication. If there was one of the towns or cities in which his language was understood—one which promised by the strength

and depth of its roots to defy all the chances of the future—that city was Toulouse, the capital of the Langue d'Oc.

The place in which he first recited the poem was the Great Hall of the Museum. When the present author saw it about two years ago, the ground floor was full of antique tombs, statues, and monuments of the past; while the hall above it was crowded with pictures and works of art, ancient and modern.

About fifteen hundred persons assembled to listen to Jasmin in the Great Hall. "It is impossible," said the local journal,* "to describe the transport with which he was received." The vast gallery was filled with one of the most brilliant assemblies that had ever met in Toulouse. Jasmin occupied the centre of the platform. At his right and left hand were seated the Mayor, the members of the Municipal Council, the Military Chiefs, the members of the Academy of Jeux-Floraux,† and many distinguished persons in science, literature, and learning. A large space had been reserved for the accommodation of ladies, who appeared in their light

* 'Journal de Toulouse,' 4th July, 1840.

† The Society of the Jeux-Floraux derives its origin from the ancient Troubadours. It claims to be the oldest society of the kind in Europe. It is said to have been founded in the fourteenth century by Clémence Isaure, a Toulousian lady, to commemorate the "Gay Science." A meeting of the society is held every year, when prizes are distributed to the authors of the best compositions in prose and verse. It somewhat resembles the annual meeting of the Eisteddfod, held for awarding prizes to the bards and composers of Wales.

summer dresses, coloured like the rainbow; and behind them stood an immense number of the citizens of Toulouse.

Jasmin had no sooner begun to recite his poem than it was clear that he had full command of his audience. Impressed by his eloquence and powers of declamation, they were riveted to their seats, dazzled and moved by turns, as the crowd of beautiful thoughts passed through their minds. The audience were so much absorbed by the poet's recitation that not a whisper was heard. He evoked by the tones and tremor of his voice their sighs, their tears, their indignation. He was by turns gay, melancholy, artless, tender, arch, courteous, and declamatory. As the drama proceeded, the audience recognised the beauty of the plot and the poet's knowledge of the human heart. He touched with grace all the cords of his lyre. His poetry evidently came direct from his heart: it was as rare as it was delicious.

The success of the recitation was complete, and when Jasmin resumed his seat he received the most enthusiastic applause. As the whole of the receipts were, as usual, handed over by Jasmin to the local charities, the assembly decided by acclamation that a subscription should be raised to present to the poet, who had been adopted by the city, some testimony of their admiration for his talent, and for his having first recited to them and dedicated to Toulouse his fine poem of *Franconnette*.

Jasmin handed over to the municipality the manu-

script of his poem in a volume beautifully bound. The Mayor, in eloquent language, accepted the work, and acknowledged the fervent thanks of the citizens of Toulouse.

As at Bordeaux, Jasmin was fêted and entertained by the most distinguished people of the city. At one of the numerous banquets at which he was present, he replied to the speech of the chairman by an impromptu in honour of those who had so splendidly entertained him. But, as he had already said: "Impromptus may be good money of the heart, but they are often the worst money of the head." *

On the day following the entertainment, Jasmin was invited to a "grand banquet" given by the coiffeurs of Toulouse, where they presented him with "a crown of immortelles and jasmines," and to them also he recited another of his impromptus.†

* The following was his impromptu to the savants of Toulouse, 4th July, 1840:—

"Oh, bon Dieu! que de gloire! Oh, bon Dieu! que d'honneurs!
Messieurs, ce jour pour ma Muse est bien doux;
Mais maintenant, d'être quitté, j'ai perdu l'espérance:
Car je viens, plus fier que jamais,
Vous payer ma reconnaissance,
Et je m'endette que plus!"

† This is the impromptu, given on the 5th July, 1840:

"Toulouse m'a donné un beau bouquet d'honneur;
Votre festin, amis, en est une belle fleur;
Aussi, dans les plaisirs de cette longue fête,
Quand je veux remercier de cela,
Je poursuis mon esprit pour ne pas être en reste
Ici, l'esprit me nait et tombe de mon cœur!"

*Franconnette* was shortly after published, and the poem was received with almost as much applause by the public as it had been by the citizens of Toulouse. Sainte-Beuve, the prince of French critics, said of the work:—

"In all his compositions Jasmin has a natural, touching idea; it is a history, either of his invention, or taken from some local tradition. With his facility as an improvisatore, aided by the patois in which he writes, . . . when he puts his *dramatis personæ* into action, he endeavours to depict their thoughts, all their simple yet lively conversation, and to clothe them in words the most artless, simple, and transparent, and in a language true, eloquent, and *sober:* never forget this latter characteristic of Jasmin's works."*

M. de Lavergne says of *Franconnette*, that, of all Jasmin's work, it is the one in which he aimed at being most entirely popular, and that it is at the same time the most noble and the most chastened. He might also have added the most chivalrous. "There is something essentially knightly," says Miss Preston, "in Pascal's cast of character, and it is singular that at the supreme crisis of his fate he assumes, as if unconsciously, the very phraseology of chivalry.

"Some squire (donzel) should follow me to death.

It is altogether natural and becoming in the high-minded smith."

M. Charles Nodier — Jasmin's old friend — was

* 'Causeries du Lundi,' iv. 240 (edit. 1852).

equally complimentary in his praises of *Franconnette*. When a copy of the poem was sent to him, with an accompanying letter, Nodier replied:—

"I have received with lively gratitude, my dear and illustrious friend, your beautiful verses, and your charming and affectionate letter. I have read them with great pleasure and profound admiration. Although ill in bed, I have devoured *Franconnette* and the other poems. I observe, with a certain pride, that you have followed my advice, and that you think in that fine language which you recite so admirably, in place of translating the patois into French, which deprives it of its fullness and fairness. I thank you a thousand times for your very flattering epistle. I am too happy to expostulate with you seriously as to the gracious things you have said to me; my name will pass to posterity in the works of my friends; the glory of having been loved by you goes for a great deal."

The time at length arrived for the presentation of the testimonial of Toulouse to Jasmin. It consisted of a branch of laurel in gold. The artist who fashioned it was charged to put his best work into the golden laurel, so that it might be a chef d'œuvre worthy of the city which conferred it, and of being treasured in the museum of their adopted poet. The work was indeed admirably executed. The stem was rough, as in nature, though the leaves were beautifully polished. It had a ribbon delicately ornamented, with the words "*Toulouse à Jasmin.*"

When the work was finished and placed in its case, the Mayor desired to send it to Jasmin by a trusty messenger. He selected Mademoiselle Gasc, assisted by her father, advocate and member of the municipal council, to present the tribute to Jasmin. It ought to have been a fête day for the people of Agen, when their illustrious townsman, though a barber, was about to receive so cordial an appreciation of his poetical genius from the learned city of Toulouse. It ought also to have been a fête day for Jasmin himself.

But alas! an unhappy coincidence occurred which saddened the day that ought to have been a day of triumph for the poet. His mother was dying. When Mademoiselle Gasc, accompanied by her father, the Mayor of Agen, and other friends of Jasmin, entered the shop, they were informed that he was by the bedside of his mother, who was at death's door. The physician, who was consulted as to her state, said that there might only be sufficient time for Jasmin to receive the deputation.

He accordingly came out for a few moments from his mother's bed-side. M. Gasc explained the object of the visit, and read to Jasmin the gracious letter of the Mayor of Toulouse, concluding as follows:—

"I thank you, in the name of the city of Toulouse, for the fine poem which you have dedicated to us. This branch of laurel will remind you of the youthful and beautiful Muse which has inspired you with such charming verses."

The Mayor of Agen here introduced Mademoiselle Gasc, who, in her turn, said :—

"And I also, sir, am most happy and proud of the mission which has been entrusted to me."

Then she presented him with the casket which contained the golden laurel. Jasmin responded in the lines entitled 'Yesterday and To-day,' from which the following words may be quoted :—

"*Yesterday!* Thanks, Toulouse, for our old language and for my poetry. Your beautiful golden branch ennobles both. And you who offer it to me, gracious messenger—queen of song and queen of hearts —tell your city of my perfect happiness, and that I never anticipated such an honour even in my most golden dreams.

"*To-day!* Fascinated by the laurel which Toulouse has sent me, and which fills my heart with joy, I cannot forget, my dear young lady, the sorrow which overwhelms me—the fatal illness of my mother—which makes me fear that the most joyful day of my life will also be the most sorrowful."

Jasmin's alarms were justified. His prayers were of no avail. His mother died with her hand in his shortly after the deputation had departed. Her husband had preceded her to the tomb a few years before. He always had a firm presentiment that he should be carried in the arm-chair to the hospital, "where all the Jasmins die." But Jasmin did his best to save his father from that indignity. He had

already broken the arm-chair, and the old tailor died peacefully in the arms of his son.

Some four months after the recitation of *Franconnette* at Toulouse, Jasmin resumed his readings in the cause of charity. In October 1840 he visited Oléron, and was received with the usual enthusiasm; and on his return to Pau, he passed the obelisk erected to Despourrins, the Burns of the Pyrenees. At Pau he recited his *Franconnette* to an immense audience amidst frenzies of applause. It was alleged that the people of the Pyrenean country were prosaic and indifferent to art. But M. Dugenne, in the 'Mémorial des Pyrenées,' said that it only wanted such a bewitching poet as Jasmin —with his vibrating and magical voice—to rouse them and set their minds on fire.

Another writer, M. Alfred Danger, paid him a still more delicate compliment.

"His poetry," he said, "is not merely the poetry of illusions; it is alive, and inspires every heart. His admirable delicacy! His profound tact in every verse! What aristocratic poet could better express in a higher degree the politeness of the heart, the truest of all politeness." *

Jasmin did not seem to be at all elated by these eulogiums. When he had finished his recitations, he returned to Agen, sometimes on foot, sometimes in the

* "La politesse du cœur," a French expression which can scarcely be translated into English; just as "gentleman" has no precise equivalent in French.

diligence, and quietly resumed his daily work. His success as a poet never induced him to resign his more humble occupation. Although he received some returns from the sale of his poems, he felt himself more independent by relying upon the income derived from his own business.

His increasing reputation never engendered in him, as is too often the case with self-taught geniuses who suddenly rise into fame, a supercilious contempt for the ordinary transactions of life. "After all," he said, "contentment is better than riches."

## CHAPTER XI.

### JASMIN'S VISIT TO PARIS.

JASMIN had been so often advised to visit Paris and test his powers there, that at length he determined to proceed to the capital of France. It is true, he had been eulogized in the criticisms of Sainte-Beuve, Léonce de Lavergne, Charles Nodier, and Charles de Mazade; but he desired to make the personal acquaintance of some of these illustrious persons, as well as to see his son, who was then settled in Paris. It was therefore in some respects a visit of paternal affection as well as literary reputation. He set out for Paris in the month of May 1842.

Jasmin was a boy in his heart and feelings, then as always. Indeed, he never ceased to be a boy—in his manners, his gaiety, his artlessness, and his enjoyment of new pleasures. What a succession of wonders to him was Paris—its streets, its boulevards, its Tuileries, its Louvre, its Arc de Triomphe—reminding him of the Revolution and the wars of the first Napoleon.

Accompanied by his son Édouard, he spent about a week in visiting the most striking memorials of the capital. They visited together the Place de la Concorde,

the Hôtel de Ville, Notre Dame, the Madeleine, the Champs Elysées, and most of the other sights. At the Colonne Vendôme, Jasmin raised his head, looked up, and stood erect, proud of the glories of France. He saw all these things for the first time, but they had long been associated with his recollections of the past.

There are "country cousins" in Paris as well as in London. They are known by their dress, their manners, their amazement at all they see. When Jasmin stood before the Vendôme Column, he extended his hand as if he were about to recite one of his poems. "Oh, my son," he exclaimed, "such glories as these are truly magnificent!" The son, who was familiar with the glories, was rather disposed to laugh. He desired, for decorum's sake, to repress his father's exclamations. He saw the people standing about to hear his father's words. "Come," said the young man, "let us go to the Madeleine, and see that famous church." "Ah, Édouard," said Jasmin, "I can see well enough that you are not a poet; not you indeed!"

During his visit, Jasmin wrote regularly to his wife and friends at Agen, giving them his impressions of Paris. His letters were full of his usual simplicity, brightness, boyishness, and enthusiasm. "What wonderful things I have already seen," he said in one of his letters, "and how many more have I to see to-morrow and the following days. M. Dûmon, Minister of Public Works" (Jasmin's compatriot and

associate at the Academy of Agen), "has given me letters of admission to Versailles, Saint-Cloud, Meudon —in fact, to all the public places that I have for so long a time been burning to see and admire."

After a week's tramping about, and seeing the most attractive sights of the capital, Jasmin bethought him of his literary friends and critics. The first person he called upon was Sainte-Beuve, at the Mazarin Library, of which he was director. "He received me like a brother," said Jasmin, "and embraced me. He said the most flattering things about my *Franconnette*, and considered it an improvement upon *L'Aveugle*. 'Continue,' he said, 'my good friend, and you will take a place in the brightest poetry of our epoch.' In showing me over the shelves in the Library containing the works of the old poets, which are still read and admired, he said, 'Like them, you will never die.'"

Jasmin next called upon Charles Nodier and Jules Janin. Nodier was delighted to see his old friend, and after a long conversation, Jasmin said that "he left him with tears in his eyes." Janin complimented him upon his works, especially upon his masterly use of the Gascon language. "Go on," he said, "and write your poetry in the patois which always appears to me so delicious. You possess the talent necessary for the purpose; it is so genuine and rare."

The Parisian journals mentioned Jasmin's appearance in the capital; the most distinguished critics had

highly approved of his works; and before long he became the hero of the day. The modest hotel in which he stayed during his visit, was crowded with visitors. Peers, ministers, deputies, journalists, members of the French Academy, came to salute the author of the 'Papillôtos.'

The proprietor of the hotel began to think that he was entertaining some prince in disguise—that he must have come from some foreign court to negotiate secretly some lofty questions of state. But when he was entertained at a banquet by the barbers and hair-dressers of Paris, the opinions of "mine host" underwent a sudden alteration. He informed Jasmin's son that he could scarcely believe that ministers of state would bother themselves with a country peruke-maker! The son laughed; he told the maître d'hôtel that his bill would be paid, and that was all he need to care for.

Jasmin was not, however, without his detractors. Even in his own country, many who had laughed heartily and wept bitterly while listening to his voice, feared lest they might have given vent to their emotions against the legitimate rules of poetry. Some of the Parisian critics were of opinion that he was immensely overrated. They attributed the success of the Gascon poet to the liveliness of the southerners, who were excited by the merest trifles; and they suspected that Jasmin, instead of being a poet, was but a clever gasconader, differing only from the rest of his class by speaking in verse instead of prose.

Now that Jasmin was in the capital, his real friends, who knew his poetical powers, desired him to put an end to these prejudices by reciting before a competent tribunal some of his most admired verses. He would have had no difficulty in obtaining a reception at the Tuileries. He had already received several kind favours from the Duke and Duchess of Orleans while visiting Agen. The Duke had presented him with a ring set in brilliants, and the Duchess had given him a gold pin in the shape of a flower, with a fine pearl surrounded by diamonds, in memory of their visit. It was this circumstance which induced him to compose his poem 'La Bago et L'Esplingo' (*La Bague et L'Épingle*) which he dedicated to the Duchess of Orleans.

But Jasmin aimed higher than the Royal family. His principal desire was to attend the French Academy; but as the Academy did not permit strangers to address their meetings, Jasmin was under the necessity of adopting another method. The Salons were open. M. Léonce de Lavergne said to him: "You are now classed among our French poets; give us a recitation in Gascon." Jasmin explained that he could not give his reading before the members of the Academy. "That difficulty," said his friend, "can soon be got over: I will arrange for a meeting at the salon of one of our most distinguished members."

It was accordingly arranged that Jasmin should give a reading at the house of M. Augustin Thierry, one of

the greatest of living historians. The élite of Parisian society were present on the occasion, including Ampère, Nizard, Burnouf, Ballanche, Villemain, and many distinguished personages of literary celebrity.

A word as to Jasmin's distinguished entertainer, M. Augustin Thierry. He had written the 'History of the Conquest of England by the Normans'—an original work of great value, though since overshadowed by the more minute 'History of the Norman Conquest,' by Professor Freeman. Yet Thierry's work is still of great interest, displaying gifts of the highest and rarest kind in felicitous combination. It shows the careful plodding of the antiquary, the keen vision of the man of the world, the passionate fervour of the politician, the calm dignity of the philosophic thinker, and the grandeur of the epic poet. Thierry succeeded in exhuming the dry bones of history, clothing them for us anew, and presenting almost visibly the "age and body of the times" long since passed away.

Thierry had also written his 'Narratives of the Merovingian Times,' and revived almost a lost epoch in the early history of France. In writing out these and other works—the results of immense labour and research—he partly lost his eyesight. He travelled into Switzerland and the South of France in the company of M. Fauriel. He could read no more, and towards the end of the year the remains of his sight entirely disappeared. He had now to read with the eyes of others, and to dictate instead of writing. In

his works he was assisted by the friendship of M. Armand Carrel, and the affection and judgment of his loving young wife.

He proceeded with courage, and was able to complete the fundamental basis of the two Frankish dynasties. He was about to follow his investigations into the history of the Goths, Huns, and Vandals, and other races which had taken part in the dismemberment of the empire. "However extended these labours," he says,* "my complete blindness could not have prevented my going through them; I was resigned as much as a courageous man can be: I had made a friendship with darkness. But other trials came: acute sufferings and the decline of my health announced a nervous disease of the most serious kind. I was obliged to confess myself conquered, and to save, if it was still time, the last remains of my health."

The last words of Thierry's Autobiographical Preface are most touching. "If, as I delight in thinking, the interest of science is counted in the number of great national interests, I have given my country all that the soldier mutilated on the field of battle gives her. Whatever may be the fate of my labours, this example I hope will not be lost. I would wish it to serve to combat the species of moral weakness which is the disease of the present generation; to bring back

* Autobiographical Preface to the 'Narratives of the Merovingian Times.'

into the straight road of life some of those enervated souls that complain of wanting faith, that know not what to do, and seek everywhere, without finding it, an object of worship and admiration. Why say, with so much bitterness, that in this world, constituted as it is, there is no air for all lungs, no employment for all minds? Is there not opportunity for calm and serious study? and is not that a refuge, a hope, a field within the reach of all of us? With it, evil days are passed over without their weight being felt; every one can make his own destiny; every one can employ his life nobly. This is what I have done, and would do again if I had to recommence my career: I would choose that which has brought me to where I am. Blind, and suffering without hope, and almost without intermission, I may give this testimony, which from me will not appear suspicious; there is something in this world better than sensual enjoyments, better than fortune, better than health itself: it is devotion to science."

## CHAPTER XII.

### JASMIN'S RECITATIONS IN PARIS.

It was a solemn and anxious moment for Jasmin when he appeared before this select party of the most distinguished literary men in Paris: he was no doubt placed at a considerable disadvantage, for his judges did not even know his language. He had frequently recited to audiences who did not know Gascon; and on such occasions he used, before commencing his recitation, to give in French a short sketch of his poem, with an explanation of some of the more difficult Gascon words. This was all; his mimic talent did the rest. His gestures were noble and well-marked. His eyes were flashing, but they became languishing when he represented tender sentiments. Then his utterance changed entirely, often suddenly, following the expressions of grief and joy. There were now smiles, now tears in his voice.

It was remarkable that Jasmin should first recite before the blind historian *The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé*. It may be that he thought it his finest poem, within the compass of time allotted to him, and that it might best please his audience. When he began to

speak in Gascon he was heard with interest. A laugh was, indeed, raised by a portion of his youthful hearers, but Jasmin flashed his penetrating eye upon them; and there was no more laughter. When he reached the tenderest part he gave way to his emotion, and wept. Tears are as contagious as smiles; and even the academicians, who may not have wept with Rachel, wept with Jasmin. It was the echo of sorrow to sorrow; the words which blind despair had evoked from the blind Margaret.

All eyes were turned to Thierry as Jasmin described the girl's blindness. The poet omitted some of the more painful lines, which might have occasioned sorrow to his kind entertainer. These lines, for instance, in Gascon:

"Jour per aoutres, toutjour! et per jou, malhurouzo,
Toutjour nèy! toutjour nèy!
Que fay negre lèn d'el! Oh! que moun amo és tristo!
Oh! que souffri, moun Diou! Couro bèn doun, Batisto!"

or, as translated by Longfellow:

"Day for the others ever, but for me
For ever night! for ever night!
When he is gone, 'tis dark! my soul is sad!
I suffer! O my God! come, make me glad."

When Jasmin omitted this verse, Thierry, who had listened with rapt attention, interrupted him. "Poet," he said, "you have omitted a passage; read the poem as you have written it." Jasmin paused, and then

added the omitted passage. "Can it be?" said the historian: "surely you, who can describe so vividly the agony of those who cannot see, must yourself have suffered blindness!" The words of Jasmin might have been spoken by Thierry himself, who in his hours of sadness often said, "I see nothing but darkness to-day."

At the end of his recital Jasmin was much applauded. Ampère, who had followed him closely in the French translation of his poem, said: "If Jasmin had never written verse, it would be worth going a hundred leagues to listen to his prose." What charmed his auditors most was his frankness. He would even ask them to listen to what he thought his best verses. "This passage," he would say, "is very fine." Then he read it afresh, and was applauded. He liked to be cheered. "Applaud! applaud!" he said at the end of his reading, "the clapping of your hands will be heard at Agen."

After the recitation an interesting conversation took place. Jasmin was asked how it was that he first began to write poetry; for every one likes to know the beginnings of self-culture. He thereupon entered into a brief history of his life; how he had been born poor; how his grandfather had died at the hospital; and how he had been brought up by charity. He described his limited education and his admission to the barber's shop; his reading of Florian; his determination to do something of a similar kind; his first efforts, his

progress, and eventually his success. He said that his object was to rely upon nature and truth, and to invest the whole with imagination and sensibility—that delicate touch which vibrated through all the poems he had written. His auditors were riveted by his sparkling and brilliant conversation.

This séance at M. Thierry's completed the triumph of Jasmin at Paris. The doors of the most renowned salons were thrown open to him. The most brilliant society in the capital listened to him and fêted him. Madame de Rémusat sent him a present of a golden pen, with the words: "I admire your beautiful poetry; I never forget you; accept this little gift as a token of my sincere admiration." Lamartine described Jasmin, perhaps with some exaggeration, as the truest and most original of modern poets.

Much of Jasmin's work was no doubt the result of intuition, for "the poet is born, not made." He was not so much the poet of art as of instinct. Yet M. Charles de Mazede said of him: "Left to himself, without study, he carried art to perfection." His defect of literary education perhaps helped him by leaving him to his own natural instincts. He himself said, with respect to the perusal of books: "I constantly read Lafontaine, Victor Hugo, Lamartine and Béranger." It is thus probable that he may have been influenced to a considerable extent by his study of the works of others.

Before Jasmin left Paris he had the honour of being

invited to visit the royal family at the palace of Neuilly, a favourite residence of Louis Philippe. The invitation was made through General de Rumigny, who came to see the poet at his hotel for the purpose. Jasmin had already made the acquaintance of the Duke and Duchess of Orleans, while at Agen a few years before. His visit to Neuilly was made on the 24th of May, 1842. He was graciously received by the royal family. The Duchess of Orleans took her seat beside him. She read the verse in Gascon which had been engraved on the pedestal of the statue at Nerac, erected to the memory of Henry IV. The poet was surprised as well as charmed by her condescension. "What, Madame," he exclaimed, "you speak the patois?" "El jou tabé" (and I also), said Louis Philippe, who came and joined the Princess and the poet. Never was Jasmin more pleased than when he heard the words of the King at such a moment.

Jasmin was placed quite at his ease by this gracious reception. The King and the Duchess united in desiring him to recite some of his poetry. He at once complied with their request, and recited his *Caritat* and *L'Abuglo* ('The Blind Girl'). After this the party engaged in conversation. Jasmin, by no means a courtier, spoke of the past, of Henry IV., and especially of Napoleon — "L'Ampéreur," as he described him. Jasmin had, in the first volume of his 'Papillôtos,' written some satirical pieces on the court and ministers of Louis Philippe. His friends wished him to omit

these pieces from the new edition of his works, which was about to be published; but he would not consent to do so. "I must give my works," he said, "just as they were composed; their suppression would be a negation of myself, and an act of adulation unworthy of any true-minded man." Accordingly they remained in the 'Papillôtos.'

Before he left the royal party, the Duchess of Orleans presented Jasmin with a golden pin, ornamented with pearls and diamonds; and the King afterwards sent him, as a souvenir of his visit to the Court, a beautiful gold watch, ornamented with diamonds. Notwithstanding the pleasure of this visit, Jasmin, as with a prophetic eye, saw the marks of sorrow upon the countenance of the King, who was already experiencing the emptiness of human glory. Scarcely had Jasmin left the palace when he wrote to his friend Madame de Virens, at Agen: "On that noble face I could see, beneath the smile, the expression of sadness; so that from to-day I can no longer say: 'Happy as a King.'"

Another entertainment, quite in contrast with his visit to the King, was the banquet which Jasmin received from the barbers and hair-dressers of Paris. He there recited the verses which he had written in their honour. M. Boisjoslin* says that half the barbers of Paris are Ibériens. For the last three centuries, in

* 'Les Peuples de la France: Ethnographie Nationale.' (Didier.)

all the legends and anecdotes, the barber is always a Gascon. The actor, the singer, often came from Provence, but much oftener from Gascony: that is the country of *la parole.*

During Jasmin's month at Paris he had been unable to visit many of the leading literary men; but he was especially anxious to see M. Chateaubriand, the father of modern French literature. Jasmin was fortunate in finding Chateaubriand at home, at 112 Rue du Bac. He received Jasmin with cordiality. "I know you intimately already," said the author of the 'Genius of Christianity;' "my friends Ampère and Fauriel have often spoken of you. They understand you, they love and admire you. They acknowledge your great talent, though they have long since bade their adieu to poetry; you know poets are very wayward," he added, with a sly smile. "You have a happy privilege, my dear sir: when our age turns prosy, you have but to take your lyre, in the sweet country of the south, and resuscitate the glory of the Troubadours. They tell me, that in one of your recent journeys you evoked enthusiastic applause, and entered many towns carpeted with flowers. Ah, *mon Dieu,* we can never do that with our prose!"

"Ah, dear sir," said Jasmin, "you have achieved much more glory than I. Without mentioning the profound respect with which all France regards you, posterity and the world will glorify you."

"Glory, indeed," replied Chateaubriand, with a sad

smile. "What is that but a flower that fades and dies; but speak to me of your sweet south; it is beautiful. I think of it, as of Italy; indeed it sometimes seems to me better than that glorious country!"

Notwithstanding his triumphant career at Paris, Jasmin often thought of Agen, and of his friends and relations at home. "Oh, my wife, my children, my guitar, my workshop, my papillôtos, my pleasant Gravier, my dear good friends, with what pleasure I shall again see you." That was his frequent remark in his letters to Agen. He was not buoyed up by the praises he had received. He remained, as usual, perfectly simple in his thoughts, ways, and habits; and when the month had elapsed, he returned joyfully to his daily work at Agen.

Jasmin afterwards described the recollections of his visit in his 'Voyage to Paris' (*Moun Bouyatage à Paris*). It was a happy piece of poetry; full of recollections of the towns and departments through which he journeyed, and finally of his arrival in Paris. Then the wonders of the capital, the crowds in the streets, the soldiers, the palaces, the statues and columns, the Tuileries where the Emperor had lived.

"I pass, and repass, not a soul I know,
Not one Agenais in this hurrying crowd;
No one salutes or shakes me by the hand."

And yet, he says, what a grand world it is! how tasteful! how fashionable! There seem to be no poor.

They are all ladies and gentlemen. Each day is a Sabbath; and under the trees the children play about the fountains. So different from Agen! He then speaks of his interview with Louis Philippe and the royal family, his recital of *L'Abuglo* before "great ladies, great writers, lords, ministers, and great savants;" and he concludes his poem with the words: "Paris makes me proud, but Agen makes me happy."

The poem is full of the impressions of his mind at the time—simple, clear, naïve. It is not a connected narrative, nor a description of what he saw, but it was full of admiration of Paris, the centre of France, and, as Frenchmen think, of civilisation. It is the simple wonder of the country cousin who sees Paris for the first time—the city that had so long been associated with his recollections of the past. And perhaps he seized its more striking points more vividly than any regular denizen of the capital.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### JASMIN AND HIS ENGLISH CRITICS.

JASMIN'S visit to Paris in 1842 made his works more extensively known, both at home and abroad. His name was frequently mentioned in the Parisian journals, and Frenchmen north of the Loire began to pride themselves on their Gascon poet. His *Blind Girl* had been translated into English, Spanish, and Italian. The principal English literary journal, the *Athenæum*, called attention to his works a few months after his appearance in Paris.* The editor introduced the subject in the following words:

"On the banks of the Garonne, in the picturesque and ancient town of Agen, there exists at this moment a man of genius of the first order—a rustic Béranger, a Victor Hugo, a Lamartine—a poet full of fire, originality, and feeling—an actor superior to any now in France, excepting Rachel, whom he resembles both in his powers of declamation and his fortunes. He is not unknown—he is no mute inglorious Milton; for the

* The *Athenæum*, 5th November, 1842. 'The Curl-papers of Jasmin, the Barber of Agen.' ('Las Papillôtos de Jasmin, Coiffeur.')

first poets, statesmen, and men of letters in France have been to visit him. His parlour chimney-piece, behind his barber's shop, is covered with offerings to his genius from royalty and rank. His smiling, dark-eyed wife, exhibits to the curious the tokens of her husband's acknowledged merit; and gold and jewels shine in the eyes of the astonished stranger, who, having heard his name, is led to stroll carelessly into the shop, attracted by a gorgeous blue cloth hung outside, on which he may have read the words, *Jasmin, Coiffeur.*"

After mentioning the golden laurels, and the gifts awarded to him by those who acknowledged his genius, the editor proceeds to mention his poems in the Gascon dialect—his *Souvenirs* his *Blind Girl* and his *Franconnette*—and then refers to his personal appearance. "Jasmin is handsome in person, with eyes full of intelligence, of good features, a mobility of expression absolutely electrifying, a manly figure, and an agreeable address; but his voice is harmony itself, and its changes have an effect seldom experienced on or off the stage. The melody attributed to Mrs. Jordan seems to approach it nearest. Had he been an actor instead of a poet, he would have 'won all hearts his way' . . . . On the whole, considering the spirit, taste, pathos, and power of this poet, who writes in a patois hitherto confined to the lower class of people in a remote district—considering the effect that his verses have made among educated persons, both French and foreign, it is impossible not to look upon him as one of

the remarkable characters of his age, and to award him, as the city of Clemence Isaure has done, the Golden Laurel, as the first of the revived Troubadours, destined perhaps to rescue his country from the reproach of having buried her poetry in the graves of Alain Chartier and Charles of Orleans, four centuries ago."

It is probable that this article in the *Athenæum* was written by Miss Louisa Stuart Costello, who had had an interview with the poet, in his house at Agen, some years before. While making her tour through Auvergne and Languedoc in 1840,* she states that she picked up three charming ballads, and was not aware that they had ever been printed. She wrote them down merely by ear, and afterwards translated *Me cal Mouri* into English (see page 57). The ballad was very popular, and was set to music. She did not then know the name of the composer, but when she ascertained that the poet was "one Jasmin of Agen," she resolved to go out of her way and call upon him, when on her journey to the Pyrenees about two years later.† She had already heard much about him before she arrived, as he was regarded in Gascony as "the greatest poet in modern times." She had no difficulty in finding his shop at the entrance to the Promenade du Gravier, with the lines in large gold letters, "Jasmin, Coiffeur."

Miss Costello entered, and was welcomed by a smiling dark-eyed woman, who informed her that her husband

* 'A Pilgrimage to Auvergne, from Picardy to Velay.' 1842.
† 'Bearn and the Pyrenees.' 1844.

was busy at that moment dressing a customer's hair, but begged that she would walk into his parlour at the back of the shop. Madame Jasmin took advantage of her husband's absence to exhibit the memorials which he had received for his gratuitous services on behalf of the public. There was the golden laurel from the city of Toulouse, the golden cup from the citizens of Auch, the gold watch with chain and seals from "Le Roi" Louis Philippe, the ring presented by the Duke of Orleans, the pearl pin from the Duchess, the fine service of linen presented by the citizens of Pau, with other offerings from persons of distinction.

At last Jasmin himself appeared, having dressed his customer's hair. Miss Costello describes his manner as well-bred and lively, and his language as free and unembarrassed. He said, however, that he was ill, and too hoarse to read. He spoke in a broad Gascon accent, very rapidly and even eloquently. He told the story of his difficulties and successes; how his grandfather had been a beggar, and all his family very poor, but that now he was as rich as he desired to be. His son, he said, was placed in a good position at Nantes, and he exhibited his picture with pride. Miss Costello told him that she had seen his name mentioned in an English Review. Jasmin said the review had been sent to him by Lord Durham, who had paid him a visit; and then Miss Costello spoke of *Me cal Mouri*, as the first poem of his that she had seen. "Oh," said he, "that little song is not my best composition: it was merely my first."

His heart was now touched. He immediately forgot his hoarseness, and proceeded to read some passages from his poems. "If I were only well," said he, "and you would give me the pleasure of your company for some time, I would kill you with weeping: I would make you die with distress for my poor Margarido, my pretty Franconnette." He then took up two copies of his *Las Papillôtos*, handed one to Miss Costello, where the translation was given in French, and read from the other in Gascon.

"He began," says the lady, "in a rich soft voice, and as we advanced we found ourselves carried away by the spell of his enthusiasm. His eyes swam in tears; he became pale and red; he trembled; he recovered himself; his face was now joyous, now exulting, gay, jocose; in fact, he was twenty actors in one; he rang the changes from Rachel to Bouffé; and he finished by relieving us of our tears, and overwhelming us with astonishment. He would have been a treasure on the stage; for he is still, though his youth is past, remarkably good-looking and striking; with black, sparkling eyes of intense expression; a fine ruddy complexion; a countenance of wondrous mobility; a good figure, and action full of fire and grace: he has handsome hands, which he uses with infinite effect; and on the whole he is the best actor of the kind I ever saw. I could now quite understand what a Troubadour or *jongleur* he might be; and I look upon Jasmin as a revived specimen of that extinct race."

Miss Costello proceeded on her journey to Bearn and the Pyrenees, and on her return northwards she again renewed her acquaintance with Jasmin and his dark-eyed wife. "I did not expect," she says, "that I should be recognised; but the moment I entered the little shop I was hailed as an old friend. 'Ah,' cried Jasmin, 'enfin la voilà encore!' I could not but be flattered by this recollection, but soon found that it was less on my own account that I was thus welcomed, than because circumstances had occurred to the poet that I might perhaps explain. He produced several French newspapers, in which he pointed out to me an article headed 'Jasmin à Londres,' being a translation of certain notices of himself which had appeared in a leading English literary journal—the *Athenæum* . . . . I enjoyed his surprise, while I informed him that I knew who was the reviewer and translator; and explained the reason for the verses giving pleasure in an English dress, to the superior simplicity of the English language over modern French, for which he had a great contempt, as unfitted for lyrical composition.* He inquired of me respecting Burns, to whom he had been likened, and begged me to tell him something about Moore.

* "There are no poets in France now," he said to Miss Costello. "There cannot be. The language does not admit of it. Where is the fire, the spirit, the expression, the tenderness, the force, of the Gascon? French is but the ladder to reach the *first floor* of the Gascon; how can you get up to a height except by means of a ladder?"

"He had a thousand things to tell me; in particular, that he had only the day before received a letter from the Duchess of Orleans, informing him that she had ordered a medal of her late husband to be struck, the first of which should be sent to him. He also announced the agreeable news of the King having granted him a pension of a thousand francs. He smiled and wept by turns as he told all this; and declared that, much as he was elated at the possession of a sum which made him a rich man for life (though it was only equal to £42), the kindness of the Duchess gratified him still more.

"He then made us sit down while he read us two new poems; both charming, and full of grace and naiveté; and one very affecting, being an address to the King, alluding to the death of his son.

"As he read, his wife stood by, and fearing that we did not comprehend the language, she made a remark to that effect, to which he answered impatiently, 'Nonsense! don't you see they are in tears?' This was unanswerable; we were allowed to hear the poem to the end, and I certainly never listened to anything more feelingly and energetically delivered.

"We had much conversation, for he was anxious to detain us; and in the course of it, he told me that he had been by some accused of vanity. 'Oh!' he exclaimed, 'what would you have? I am a child of nature, and cannot conceal my feelings; the only difference between me and a man of refinement is, that

he knows how to conceal his vanity and exaltation at success, while I let everybody see my emotions.'

"His wife drew me aside, and asked my opinion as to how much money it would cost to pay Jasmin's expenses, if he undertook a journey to England. 'However,' she added, 'I dare say he need be at no charge, for of course your Queen has read that article in his favour, and knows his merit. She probably will send for him, pay all the expenses of his journey, and give him great fêtes in London!" Miss Costello, knowing the difficulty of obtaining Royal recognition of literary merit in England, unless it appears *in formâ pauperis*, advised the barber-poet to wait till he was sent for—a very good advice, for then it would be *never!* She concludes her recollections with this remark: "I left the happy pair, promising to let them know the effect that the translation of Jasmin's poetry produced in the Royal mind. Indeed, their earnest simplicity was really entertaining."

A contributor to the *Westminster Review* * also gave a very favourable notice of Jasmin and his poetry, which, he said, was less known in England than it deserved to be; nor was it well known in France since he wrote in a patois. Yet he had been well received by some of the most illustrious men in the capital, where unaided genius, to be successful, must be genius indeed; and there the Gascon bard had acquired for himself a fame of which any man might well be proud.

* *Westminster Review* for October, 1849.

The reviewer said that the Gascon patois was peculiarly expressive and heart-touching, and in the South it was held in universal honour. Jasmin, he continued, is what Burns was to the Scottish peasantry; only he received his honours in his lifetime. The comparison with Burns, however, was not appropriate. Burns had more pith, vigour, variety, and passion, than Jasmin—who was more of a descriptive writer. In some respects Jasmin resembled Allan Ramsay, a barber and periwig-maker, like himself, whose *Gentle Shepherd* met with as great a success as Jasmin's *Franconnette*. Jasmin, however, was the greater poet of the two.

The reviewer in the *Westminster*, who had seen Jasmin at Agen, goes on to speak of the honours he had received in the South and at Paris—his recitations in the little room behind his shop—his personal appearance, his hearty and simple manners—and yet his disdain of the mock modesty it would be affectation to assume. The reviewer thus concludes: "From the first prepossessing, he gains upon you every moment; and when he is fairly launched into the recital of one of his poems, his rich voice does full justice to the harmonious Gascon. The animation and feeling he displays becomes contagious. Your admiration kindles, and you become involved in his ardour. You forget the little room in which he recites; you altogether forget the barber, and rise with him into a superior world, an experience in a way you will never forget, the power

exercised by a true poet when pouring forth his living thoughts in his own verses. . . .

"Such is Jasmin—lively in imagination, warm in temperament, humorous, playful, easily made happy, easily softened, enthusiastically fond of his province, of its heroes, of its scenery, of its language, and of its manners. He is every inch a Gascon, except that he has none of that consequential self-importance, or of the love of boasting and exaggeration, which, falsely or not, is said to characterise his countrymen.

"Born of the people, and following a humble trade, he is proud of both circumstances; his poems are full of allusions to his calling; and without ever uttering a word in disparagment of other classes, he everywhere sings the praises of his own. He stands by his order. It is from it he draws his poetry; it is there he finds his romance.

"And this is his great charm, as it is his chief distinction. He invests virtue, however lowly, with the dignity that belongs to it. He rewards merit, however obscure, with its due honour. Whatever is true or beautiful or good, finds from him an immediate sympathy. The true is never rejected by him because it is commonplace; nor the beautiful because it is everyday; nor the good because it is not also great. He calls nothing unclean but vice and crime. He sees meanness in nothing but in the sham, the affectation, and the spangles of outward show.

"But while it is in exalting lowly excellence that

Jasmin takes especial delight, he is not blind, as some are, to excellence in high places. All he seeks is the sterling and the real. He recognises the sparkle of the diamond as well as that of the dewdrop. But he will not look upon paste.

"He is thus pre-eminently the poet of nature; not, be it understood, of inanimate nature only, but of nature also, as it exists in our thoughts, and words, and acts—of nature as it is to be found living and moving in humanity. But we cannot paint him so well as he paints himself. We well remember how, in his little shop at Agen, he described to us what he believed to be characteristic of his poetry; and we find in a letter from him to M. Léonce de Lavergne the substance of what he then said to us:

"'I believe,' he said, 'that I have portrayed a part of the noble sentiments which men and women may experience here below. I believe that I have emancipated myself more than anyone has ever done from every school, and I have placed myself in more direct communication with nature. My poetry comes from my heart. I have taken my pictures from around me in the most humble conditions of men; and I have done for my native language all that I could.'"

A few years later Mr. Angus B. Reach, a well-known author, and a contributor to *Punch* in its earlier days, was appointed a commissioner by the *Morning Chronicle* to visit, for industrial purposes, the districts in the South of France. His reports appeared in the *Chronicle;* but in

1852, Mr. Reach published a fuller account of his journeys in a volume entitled 'Claret and Olives, from the Garonne to the Rhone.'* In passing through the South of France, Mr. Reach stopped at Agen. "One of my objects," he says, "was to pay a literary visit to a very remarkable man—Jasmin, the peasant-poet of Provence and Languedoc—the 'Last of the Troubadours,' as, with more truth than is generally to be found in *ad captandum* designations, he terms himself, and is termed by the wide circle of his admirers; for Jasmin's songs and rural epics are written in the patois of the people, and that patois is the still almost unaltered *Langue d'Oc*—the tongue of the chivalric minstrelsy of yore.

"But Jasmin is a Troubadour in another sense than that of merely availing himself of the tongue of the *ménestrels*. He publishes, certainly, conforming so far to the usages of our degenerate modern times; but his great triumphs are his popular recitations of his poems. Standing bravely up before an expectant assembly of perhaps a couple of thousand persons—the hot-blooded and quick-brained children of the South—the modern Troubadour plunges over head and ears into his lays,

* Published by David Bogue, Fleet Street. 1852. Mr. Reach was very particular about the pronunciation of his name. Being a native of Inverness, the last vowel was guttural. One day, dining with Douglas Jerrold, who insisted on addressing him as Mr. Reek or Reech, "No," said the other; "my name is neither Reek nor Reech, but Reach." "Very well," said Jerrold, "Mr. Reach will you have a Peach?"

evoking both himself and his applauding audiences into fits of enthusiasm and excitement, which, whatever may be the excellence of the poetry, an Englishman finds it difficult to conceive or account for.

"The raptures of the New Yorkers and Bostonians with Jenny Lind are weak and cold compared with the ovations which Jasmin has received. At a recitation given shortly before my visit to Auch, the ladies present actually tore the flowers and feathers out of their bonnets, wove them into extempore garlands, and flung them in showers upon the panting minstrel; while the editors of the local papers next morning assured him, in floods of flattering epigrams, that humble as he was now, future ages would acknowledge the 'divinity' of a Jasmin!

"There is a feature, however, about these recitations which is still more extraordinary than the uncontrollable fits of popular enthusiasm which they produce. His last entertainment before I saw him was given in one of the Pyrenean cities, and produced 2,000 francs. Every sous of this went to the public charities; Jasmin will not accept a stiver of money so earned. With a species of perhaps overstrained, but certainly exalted, chivalric feeling, he declines to appear before an audience to exhibit for money the gifts with which nature has endowed him.

"After, perhaps, a brilliant tour through the South of France, delighting vast audiences in every city, and flinging many thousands of francs into every

poor-box which he passes, the poet contentedly returns to his humble occupation, and to the little shop where he earns his daily bread by his daily toil as a barber and hair-dresser. It will be generally admitted that the man capable of self-denial of so truly heroic a nature as this, is no ordinary poetaster.

"One would be puzzled to find a similar instance of perfect and absolute disinterestedness in the roll of minstrels, from Homer downwards; and, to tell the truth, there does seem a spice of Quixotism mingled with and tinging the pure fervour of the enthusiast. Certain it is, that the Troubadours of yore, upon whose model Jasmin professes to found his poetry, were by no means so scrupulous. 'Largesse' was a very prominent word in their vocabulary; and it really seems difficult to assign any satisfactory reason for a man refusing to live upon the exercise of the finer gifts of his intellect, and throwing himself for his bread upon the daily performance of mere mechanical drudgery.

"Jasmin, as may be imagined, is well known in Agen. I was speedily directed to his abode, near the open Place of the town, and within earshot of the rush of the Garonne; and in a few moments I found myself pausing before the lintel of the modest shop inscribed *Jasmin, Perruquier, Coiffeur des jeunes Gens.* A little brass basin dangled above the threshold; and looking through the glass I saw the master of the establishment shaving a fat-faced neighbour. Now I had come to see and pay my compliments to a poet, and there did

appear to me to be something strangely awkward and irresistibly ludicrous in having to address, to some extent, in a literary and complimentary vein, an individual actually engaged in so excessively prosaic and unelevated a species of performance.

"I retreated, uncertain what to do, and waited outside until the shop was clear. Three words explained the nature of my visit, and Jasmin received me with a species of warm courtesy, which was very peculiar and very charming; dashing at once, with the most clattering volubility and fiery speed of tongue, into a sort of rhapsodical discourse upon poetry in general, and the patois of it, spoken in Languedoc, Provence, and Gascony in particular.

"Jasmin is a well-built and strongly limbed man of about fifty, with a large, massive head, and a broad pile of forehead, overhanging two piercingly bright black eyes, and features which would be heavy, were they allowed a moment's repose from the continual play of the facial muscles, sending a never-ending series of varying expressions across the dark, swarthy visage. Two sentences of his conversation were quite sufficient to stamp his individuality.

"The first thing which struck me was the utter absence of all the mock-modesty, and the pretended self-underrating, conventionally assumed by persons expecting to be complimented upon their sayings or doings. Jasmin seemed thoroughly to despise all such flimsy hypocrisy. 'God only made four French-

men poets,' he burst out with, 'and their names are, Corneille, Lafontaine, Béranger, and Jasmin!'

"Talking with the most impassioned vehemence, and the most redundant energy of gesture, he went on to declaim against the influences of civilisation upon language and manners as being fatal to all real poetry. If the true inspiration yet existed upon earth, it burned in the hearts and brains of men far removed from cities, salons, and the clash and din of social influences. Your only true poets were the unlettered peasants, who poured forth their hearts in song, not because they wished to make poetry, but because they were joyous and true.

"Colleges, academies, schools of learning, schools of literature, and all such institutions, Jasmin denounced as the curse and the bane of true poetry. They had spoiled, he said, the very French language. You could no more write poetry in French now than you could in arithmetical figures. The language had been licked and kneaded, and tricked out, and plumed, and dandified, and scented, and minced, and ruled square, and chipped—(I am trying to give an idea of the strange flood of epithets he used)—and pranked out, and polished, and muscadined—until, for all honest purposes of true high poetry, it was mere unavailable and contemptible jargon.

"It might do for cheating *agents de change* on the Bourse—for squabbling politicians in the Chambers—for mincing dandies in the salons—for the sarcasm of

Scribe-ish comedies, or the coarse drolleries of Palais Royal farces, but for poetry the French language was extinct. All modern poets who used it were *faiseurs de phrase*—thinking about words and not feelings. 'No, no,' my Troubadour continued, 'to write poetry, you must get the language of a rural people—a language talked among fields, and trees, and by rivers and mountains—a language never minced or disfigured by academies and dictionary-makers, and journalists; you must have a language like that which your own Burns, whom I read of in Chateaubriand, used; or like the brave, old, mellow tongue—unchanged for centuries—stuffed with the strangest, quaintest, richest, raciest idioms and odd solemn words, full of shifting meanings and associations, at once pathetic and familiar, homely and graceful—the language which I write in, and which has never yet been defiled by calculating men of science or jack-a-dandy *littérateurs*.'

"The above sentences may be taken as a specimen of the ideas with which Jasmin seemed to be actually overflowing from every pore in his body—so rapid, vehement, and loud was his enunciation of them. Warming more and more as he went on, he began to sketch the outlines of his favourite pieces. Every now and then plunging into recitation, jumping from French into patois, and from patois into French, and sometimes spluttering them out, mixed up pell-mell together. Hardly pausing to take breath, he rushed about the shop as he discoursed, lugging out, from

old chests and drawers, piles of old newspapers and reviews, pointing out a passage here in which the estimate of the writer pleased him, a passage there which showed how perfectly the critic had mistaken the scope of his poetic philosophy, and exclaiming, with the most perfect *naïveté*, how mortifying it was for men of original and profound genius to be misconceived and misrepresented by pigmy whipper-snapper scamps of journalists.

"There was one review of his works, published in a London 'Recueil,' as he called it, to which Jasmin referred with great pleasure. A portion of it had been translated, he said, in the preface to a French edition of his works; and he had most of the highly complimentary phrases by heart. The English critic, he said, wrote in the *Tintinum*, and he looked dubiously at me when I confessed that I had never heard of the organ in question. '*Pourtant*,' he said, '*je vous le ferai voir*,' and I soon perceived that Jasmin's *Tintinum* was no other than the *Athenæum!*

"In the little back drawing-room behind the shop, to which the poet speedily introduced me, his sister [it must have been his wife], a meek, smiling woman, whose eyes never left him, following as he moved with a beautiful expression of love and pride in his glory, received me with simple cordiality. The walls were covered with testimonials, presentations, and trophies awarded by critics and distinguished persons, literary and political, to the modern Troubadour. Not a few of

these are of a nature to make any man most legitimately proud. Jasmin possesses gold and silver vases, laurel branches, snuff-boxes, medals of honour, and a whole museum of similar gifts, inscribed with such characteristic and laconic legends as '*Au Poète, Les Jeunes filles de Toulouse reconnaissantes!*' &c.

"The number of garlands of *immortelles*, wreaths of ivy-*jasmin* (punning upon the name), laurel, and so forth, utterly astonished me. Jasmin preserved a perfect shrubbery of such tokens; and each symbol had, of course, its pleasant associative remembrance. One was given by the ladies of such a town; another was the gift of the prefect's wife of such a department. A handsome full-length portrait had been presented to the poet by the municipal authorities of Agen; and a letter from M. Lamartine, framed, above the chimney-piece, avowed the writer's belief that the Troubadour of the Garonne was the Homer of the modern world. M. Jasmin wears the ribbon of the Legion of Honour, and has several valuable presents which were made to him by the late ex-king and different members of the Orleans family.

"I have been somewhat minute in giving an account of my interview with M. Jasmin, because he is really the popular poet—the peasant poet of the South of France—the Burns of Limousin, Provence, and Languedoc. His songs are in the mouths of all who sing in the fields and by the cottage firesides. Their subjects are always rural, naive, and full of rustic pathos and rustic drollery. To use his words to me, he

sings what the hearts of the people say, and he can no more help it than can the birds in the trees. Translations into French of his main poems have appeared; and compositions more full of natural and thoroughly unsophisticated pathos and humour it would be difficult to find.

"Jasmin writes from a teeming brain and a beaming heart; and there is a warmth and a glow, and a strong, happy, triumphant march of song about his poems, which carry you away in the perusal as they carried away the author in the writing. I speak, of course, from the French translations, and I can well conceive that they give but a comparatively faint transcript of the pith and power of the original. The patois in which these poems are written is the common peasant language of the South-west of France. It varies in some slight degree in different districts, but not more than the broad Scotch of Forfarshire differs from that of Ayrshire. As for the dialect itself, it seems in the main to be a species of cross between old French and Spanish—holding, however, I am assured, rather to the latter tongue than to the former, and constituting a bold, copious, and vigorous speech, very rich in its colouring, full of quaint words and expressive phrases, and especially strong in all that relates to the language of the passions and affections.

"I hardly know how long my interview with Jasmin might have lasted, for he seemed by no means likely to tire of talking, and his talk was too good and too

curious not to be listened to with interest; but the sister [or wife] who had left us for a moment, coming back with the intelligence that there was quite a gathering of customers in the shop, I hastily took my leave, the poet squeezing my hand like a vice, and immediately thereafter dashing into all that appertains to curling-irons, scissors, razors, and lather, with just as much apparent energy and enthusiasm as he had flung into his rhapsodical discourse on poetry and language!"

It is scarcely necessary to apologise for the length of this extract, because no author that we know of—not even any French author—has given so vivid a description of the man as he lived, moved, and talked, as Mr. Reach; and we believe the reader will thank us for quoting from an almost entirely forgotten book, the above graphic description of the Gascon Poet.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### JASMIN'S TOURS OF PHILANTHROPY.

THE poet had no sooner returned from his visit to Paris than he was besieged with appeals to proceed to the relief of the poor in the South of France. Indeed, for more than thirty years he devoted a considerable part of his time to works of charity and benevolence. He visited successively cities and towns so far remote from each other, as Bayonne and Marseilles, Bagnères and Lyons. He placed his talents at the service of the public from motives of sheer benevolence, for the large collections which were made at his recitations were not of the slightest personal advantage to himself.

The first place he visited on this occasion was Carcassonne, south-east of Toulouse,—a town of considerable importance, and containing a large number of poor people. M. Dugué, prefect of the Aude, wrote to Jasmin: "The crying needs of this winter have called forth a desire to help the poor; but the means are sadly wanting. Our thoughts are necessarily directed to you. Will you come and help us?" Jasmin at once complied. He was entertained by the prefect.

After several successful recitations, a considerable sum of money was collected for the relief of the poor of Carcassonne. To perpetuate the recollection of Jasmin's noble work, and to popularise the genius of the poet, the Prefect of the Aude arranged that Jasmin's poems should be distributed amongst all the schools of his department, and for this purpose a portion of the surplus funds was placed at the disposal of the Council-general.

Bordeaux next appealed to the poet. He had a strong love for Bordeaux. It was the place where he had first recited his *Blind Girl*, where he had first attracted public attention, and where he was always admired and always fêted. The Orphan Institution of the city was in difficulties; its funds were quite exhausted; and who should be invited to come to their help but their old friend Jasmin? He was again enthusiastically received. The Franklin Rooms were crowded, and money flowed quickly into the orphans' treasury. Among the poems he recited was the following:—

## THE SHEPHERD AND THE GASCON POET.*

*Aux Bordelais, au jour de ma grande Séance au Casino.*

In a far land, I know not where,
Ere viol's sigh, or organ's swell,
Had made the sons of song aware
That music is a potent spell:

* We adopt the translation of Miss Costello.

A shepherd to a city came,
Play'd on his pipe, and rose to fame.
He sang of fields, and at each close,
Applause from ready hands arose.

The simple swain was hail'd and crown'd,
In mansions where the great reside,
And cheering smiles and praise he found,
And in his heart rose honest pride.
All seem'd with joy and rapture gleaming,
He trembled lest he was but dreaming.

But, modest still, his soul was moved;
Yet of his hamlet was his thought—
Of friends at home, and her he loved,
When back his laurel branch he brought.
And pleasure beaming in his eyes,
Enjoyed their welcome and surprise.
'Twas thus with me when Bordeaux deigned
To listen to my rustic song:
Whose music praise and honour gain'd
More than to rural strains belong.

Delighted, charm'd, I scarcely knew
Whence sprung this life so fresh and new,
And to my heart I whispered low,
When to my fields returned again,
"Is not the Gascon Poet now
As happy as the shepherd swain?"

The minstrel never can forget,
The spot where first success he met;
But he, the shepherd who, of yore,
Has charm'd so many a list'ing ear,
Came back, and was beloved no more.
He found all changed and cold and drear!

A skilful hand had touch'd the flute;
His pipe and he were scorn'd—were mute.

But I, once more I dared appear,
And found old friends so true and dear.
The mem'ry of my ancient lays
Lived in their hearts, awoke their praise.
Oh! they did more. I was their guest;
Again was welcomed and caress't,
And, twined with their melodious tongue,
Again my rustic carol rung;
And my old language proudly found
Her words had list'ners pressing round.
Thus, though condemn'd the shepherd's skill,
The Gascon Poet triumph'd still.

At the end of the recital a pretty little orphan girl came forward and presented Jasmin with a laurel adorned with a ruby, with these words in golden letters, "To Jasmin, with the orphans' gratitude." Jasmin finally descended from the rostrum and mixed with the audience, who pressed round him and embraced him. The result was the collection of more than a thousand francs for the orphans' fund.

No matter what the institution was, or where it was situated, if it was in difficulties, and Jasmin was appealed to, provided it commended itself to his judgment, he went far and near to give his help. A priest at a remote place in Perigord had for some time endeavoured to found an agricultural colony for the benefit of the labourers, and at last wrote to Jasmin for assistance. The work had been patronised by

most of the wealthy people of the province; but the colony did not prosper. There remained no one to help them but the noble barber of Agen. Without appealing any more to the rich for further aid, the priest applied to Jasmin through a mutual friend, one of the promoters of the undertaking, who explained to him the nature of the enterprise. The following was Jasmin's answer:—

"MY DEAR SIR,—I have already heard of the pious work of the curate of Vedey, and shall be most happy to give him my services for one or two evenings, though I regret that I must necessarily defer my visit until after the month of February next. In May I have promised to go twice to the help of the Albigenses, in aid of their hospital and the poor of Alba. I start to-morrow for Cahors, to help in a work equally benevolent, begun long ago. I am engaged for the month of August for Foix and Bagnères de Luchon, in behalf of a church and an agricultural society. All my spare time, you will observe, is occupied; and though I may be tired out by my journeys, I will endeavour to rally my forces and do all that I can for you. Tell the curate of Vedey, therefore, that as his labour has been of long continuance, my Muse will be happy to help his philanthropic work during one or two evenings at Périgueux, in the month of March next.

"Yours faithfully,

"J. JASMIN."

In due time Jasmin fulfilled his promise, and a considerable sum was collected in aid of the agricultural colony, which, to his great joy, was eventually established and prospered. On another and a very different occasion the Society of Arts and Literature appealed to him. Their object was to establish a fund for the assistance of the poorer members of their craft —something like the Royal Literary Fund of London. The letter addressed to him was signed by Baron Taylor, Ingres, Ambroise Thomas, Auber, Meyerbeer, Adolphe Adam, Jules Simon, Zimmermann, Halévy, and others. It seemed extraordinary that men of such distinction in art and literature should appeal to a man of such humble condition, living at so remote a place as Agen.

"We ask your help," they said, "for our work, which has only been begun, and is waiting for assistance. We desire to have the encouragement and powerful support of men of heart and intelligence. Do not be surprised, sir, that we address this demand to you. We have not yet appealed to the part of France in which you live; but we repose our hopes in your admirable talent, inspired as it is with Christian charity, which has already given birth to many benefactions, for the help of churches, schools, and charitable institutions, and has spread amongst your compatriots the idea of relieving the poor and necessitous." Incited by these illustrious men, Jasmin at once took the field, and by his

exertions did much towards the foundation of the proposed institution.

The strength of his constitution seemed to be inexhaustible. On one occasion he went as far as Marseilles. He worked, he walked, he travelled, he recited almost without end. Though he sometimes complained of being over-tired, he rallied, and went on as before. At Marseilles, for instance, he got up early in the morning, and at 8 A.M. he was present at a private council in a school. At 11 he presided at a meeting of the Society of Saint Francis Xavier, where he recited several of his poems before two thousand persons. At 2 o'clock he was present at a banquet given in his honour. In the evening he had another triumphant reception. In the morning he spoke of country, religion, and work to the humbler classes, and in the evening he spoke of love and charity to a crowded audience of distinguished ladies. He was entertained at Marseilles like a prince, rather than like a poet.

He sometimes gave as many as three hundred recitations of this sort in a year; visiting nearly every town from Bordeaux to Marseilles for all kinds of charitable institutions. Of course his travels were enlivened by many adventures, and some people were unwilling to allow him to forget that he was a barber. When at Auch, a town several miles to the south of Agen, he resided with the mayor. The time for the meeting had nearly arrived; but the mayor was still busy with his toilet. The prefect of Gers was also

waiting. Fearing the impatience of his guests, the mayor opened the door of his chamber to apologise, showing his face covered with lather.

"Just a moment," he said; "I am just finishing my shaving."

"Oh," said Jasmin, "why did you not perform your toilet sooner? But now let me help you." Jasmin at once doffed his coat, gave the finishing touch to his razor, and shaved the mayor in a twinkling, with what he called his "hand of velvet." In a few minutes after, Jasmin was receiving tumultuous applause for his splendid recitations.

Thus, as time was pressing, it was a pleasure to Jasmin to make himself useful to his friend the mayor. But on another occasion he treated a rich snob in the way he deserved. Jasmin had been reciting for the benefit of the poor. At the conclusion of the meeting, the young people of the town improvised a procession of flambeaux and triumphantly escorted him to his hotel.

Early next morning, while Jasmin was still asleep, he was awakened by some one knocking at his chamber door. He rose, opened it, and found himself in presence of one of the most opulent persons of the town. There are vulgar people everywhere, and this person had more wealth than courtesy. Like Jasmin, he was a man of the people; but he had neither the grace nor the politeness of the Gascon barber. He was but a parvenu, and his riches had only produced an accumu-

lation of snobbishness. He pushed into the room, installed himself without invitation in a chair, and, without further ceremony, proceeded—

"My dear Jasmin," he said, "I am a banker—a millionaire, as you know; I wish you to shave me with your own hand. Please set to work at once, for I am pressed for time. You can ask what you like for your trouble."

"Pardon me, sir," said Jasmin, with some pride, "I only shave for pay at home."

"What do you say?"

"It is true, sir; I only shave for pay at home."

"Come, come—you are jesting! I cannot be put off. Make your charge as much as you like—but shave me."

"Again I say, sir, it is impossible."

"How impossible? It seems to me that it is your trade!"

"It is so; but at this moment I am not disposed to exercise it."

The banker again pleaded; Jasmin was firm; and the millionaire went away unshaved!

During one of his recitations at Toulouse, he was introduced to Mdlle. Roaldés, a young and beautiful lady, with whose father, a thriving stockbroker, he stayed while in that city. His house was magnificent and splendidly furnished. Many persons of influence were invited to meet Jasmin, and, while there, he was entertained with much hospitality. But, as often happens with stockbrokers, M. Roaldés' star fell; he

suffered many losses, and at length became poor and almost destitute.

One day, while Jasmin was sharpening his razors in his shop in Agen, who should appear but Mdlle. Thérèse Roaldés, sad and dejected. It was the same young lady who had charmed him, not only by her intellectual converse, but by her admirable musical ability. She had sung brilliantly at the entertainment given at her father's house, and now she came to lay her case before the Agenaise barber! She told her whole story, ending with the present destitution of her father—formerly the rich stockbroker.

"What can we do now?" asked Jasmin; "something must be done at once."

Mdlle. Roaldés judged rightly of the generous heart of Jasmin. He was instantly ready and willing to help her. They might not restore her father's fortunes, but they might rescue him from the poverty and humiliations in which his sudden reverse of fortune had involved him. The young lady had only her voice and her harp, but Jasmin had his "Curl-papers." Mdlle. Roaldés was beautiful; could her beauty have influenced Jasmin? For beauty has a wonderful power in the world. But goodness is far better, and it was that and her filial love which principally influenced Jasmin in now offering her his assistance.

The two made their first appearance at Agen. They gave their performance in the theatre, which was crowded. The name of Mdlle. Roaldés excited the

greatest sympathy, for the misfortunes of her father were well known in the South. For this beautiful girl to descend from her brilliant home in Toulouse to the boards of a theatre at Agen, was a sad blow, but her courage bore her up, and she excited the sympathetic applause of the audience. In the midst of the general enthusiasm, Jasmin addressed the charming lady in some lines which he had prepared for the occasion. Holding in his hand a bouquet of flowers, he said—

"Oh well they bloom for you! Mothers and daughters,
Throw flowers to her, though moistened with your tears.
These flowers receive them, for
They bear the incense of our hearts.
* * * *
Daughter of heaven, oh, sing! your name shines bright,
The earth applauds, and God will bless you ever."

At the conclusion of his poem, Jasmin threw his wreath of flowers to the young lady, and in an instant she was covered with flowers by the audience. Mdlle. Roaldés was deeply moved. She had faced a public audience for the first time; she had been received with applause, and from that moment she felt confidence in her performances as well as in her labour of love.

The poet, with the singer and harpist, made a tour in the southern provinces, and the two muses, poetry and music, went from town to town, enlivening and enlightening the way. Every heart praised the poet for giving his services to his young and beautiful friend.

They applauded also the lovely woman who made her harp-chords vibrate with her minstrel's music. The pair went to Montauban, Albi, Toulouse, and Nîmes; they were welcomed at Avignon, the city of Petrarch and the Popes. Marseilles forgot for a time her harbour and her ships, and listened with rapture to the musician and the poet.

At Marseilles Jasmin felt himself quite at home. In the intervals between the concerts and recitals, he made many new friends, as well as visited many old ones. His gay and genial humour, his lively sallies, his brilliant recitals, brought him friends from every circle. M. Merv, in a political effusion, welcomed the Gascon poet. He was invited to a fête of *l'Athénée-Ouvrier* (the Workman's Athenæum); after several speeches, Jasmin rose and responded:

"I am proud," he said, "of finding myself among the members of this society, and of being welcomed by men who are doubly my brethren—by the labour of the hands and by the labour of the head. You have moved me and astonished me, and I have incurred to *l'Athénée-Ouvrier* a poetical debt which my muse can only repay with the most tender recollections."

Many pleasant letters passed between Jasmin and Mdlle. de Roaldés. The lady entertained the liveliest gratitude to the poet, who had helped her so nobly in her misfortunes. On the morning after her first successful appearance at Agen, she addressed to him a letter full of praise and thankfulness. She ended it

thus: "Most amiable poet, I adore your heart, and I do homage to your genius." In a future letter she confessed that the rays of the sun were not less welcome than the rays of his genius, and that her music would have been comparatively worthless but for his poetry.

Towards the end of their joint entertainment she again wrote to him: "You have become, my dear poet, my shower of gold, my heaven-sent manna, while you continue your devotion to my personal interests. . . . As a poet, I give you all the glory; as a friend, I owe you the affection of my filial heart, the hopes of a better time, and the consolation of my future days . . . Let it be remembered that this good deed on your part is due to your heart and will. May it protect you during your life, and make you blest in the life which is to come!"

While at Nîmes, the two poet-artisans met—Reboul the baker and Jasmin the barber. Reboul, who attended the music-recitation, went up to Jasmin and cordially embraced him, amidst the enthusiastic cheers of three thousand people. Jasmin afterwards visited Reboul at his bakery, where they had a pleasant interview with respect to the patois of Provence and Gascony. At the same time it must be observed that Reboul did not write in patois, but in classical French.

Reboul had published a volume of poems which attracted the notice and praise of Lamartine and Alexandre Dumas. Perhaps the finest poem in the volume is entitled *The Angel and Child.* Reboul had

lost his wife and child; he sorrowed greatly at their death, and this poem was the result. The idea is simple and beautiful. An angel, noticing a lovely child in its cradle, and deeming it too pure for earth, bears its spirit away to Heaven. The poem has been admirably translated by Longfellow..

Dumas, in 'Pictures of Travel in the South of France, relates an interview with the baker-poet of Nîmes.

"What made you a poet?" asked Dumas.

"It was sorrow," replied Reboul—"the loss of a beloved wife and child. I was in great grief; I sought solitude, and, finding no one who could understand me, poured forth my grief to the Almighty."

"Yes," said Dumas, "I now comprehend your feelings. It is thus that true poets become illustrious. How many men of talent only want a great misfortune to become men of genius! You have told me in a word the secret of your life; I know it now as well as you do." And yet Jasmin, the contemporary of Reboul, had written all his poetry without a sorrow, and amidst praise and joyfulness.

Chateaubriand, when in the South of France, called upon Reboul. The baker met him at the door.

"Are you M. Reboul?" inquired the author of 'The Martyrs.'

'Which, sir—the baker or the poet?"

"The poet, of course."

"Then the poet cannot be seen until mid-day. At present the baker is working at the oven."

Chateaubriand accordingly retired, but returned at the time appointed, and had a long and interesting conversation with Reboul.

While at Montpellier Jasmin received two letters from Madame Lafarge, then in prison. The circumstances connected with her case were much discussed in the journals of the time. She had married at seventeen a M. Lafarge, and found after her marriage that he had deceived her as to his property. Ill-feeling arose between the unhappy pair, and eventually she was tried for poisoning her husband. She was condemned with extenuating circumstances, and imprisoned at Montpellier in 1839. She declared that she was innocent of the crime imputed to her, and Jasmin's faith in the virtue of womanhood led him to believe her. Her letters to Jasmin were touching.

"Many pens," she said, "have celebrated your genius; let mine touch your heart! Oh, yes, sir, you are good, noble, and generous! I preserve every word of yours as a dear consolation; I guard each of your promises as a holy hope. Voltaire has saved Calas. Sing for me, sir, and I will bless your memory to the day of my death. I am innocent! . . . For eight long years I have suffered; and I am still suffering from the stain upon my honour. I grieve for a sight of the sun, but I still love life. Sing for me."

She again wrote to Jasmin, endeavouring to excite his interest by her appreciation of his poems.

"The spirit of your work," she said, "vibrates

through me in every form. What a pearl of eulogy is *Maltro!* What a great work is *L'Abuglo!* In the first of these poems you reach the sublime of love without touching a single chord of passion. What purity, and at the same time what ease and tenderness! It is not only the fever of the heart; it is life itself, its religion, its virtue. This poor *Innuocento* does not live to love; she loves to live. . . . Her love diffuses itself like a perfume—like the scent of a flower. . . . In writing *Maltro* your muse becomes virgin and Christian; and to dictate *L'Abuglo* is a crown of flowers, violets mingled with roses, like Tibullus, Anacreon, and Horace."

And again: "Poet, be happy; sing in the language of your mother, of your infancy, of your loves, your sorrows. The Gascon songs, revived by you, can never be forgotten. Poet, be happy! The language which you love, France will learn to admire and read, and your brother-poets will learn to imitate you. . . . Spirit speaks to spirit; genius speaks to the heart. Sing, poet, sing! Envy jeers in vain; your Muse is French; better still, it is Christian, and the laurel at the end of your course has two crowns—one for the forehead of the poet and the other for the heart of the man. Grand actions bring glory; good deeds bring happiness."

Although Jasmin wrote an interesting letter to Madame Lafarge, he did not venture to sing or recite for her relief from prison. She died before him, in 1852.

## CHAPTER XV.

### JASMIN'S VINEYARD—'MARTHA THE INNOCENT.'

AGEN, with its narrow and crooked streets, is not altogether a pleasant town, excepting, perhaps, the beautiful promenade of the Gravier, where Jasmin lived. Yet the neighbourhood of Agen is exceedingly picturesque, especially the wooded crags of the Hermitage and the pretty villas near the convent of the Carmelites. From these lofty sites a splendid view of the neighbouring country is to be seen along the windings of the Garonne, and far off, towards the south, to the snowy peaks of the Pyrenees.

Down beneath the Hermitage and the crags a road winds up the valley towards Verona, once the home of the famous Scaligers.* Near this place Jasmin bought a little vineyard, and established his Tivoli. In this pretty spot his muse found pure air, liberty, and privacy. He called the place—like his volume of poems—his "*Papillôte*," his "Curlpaper." Here, for nearly thirty years, he spent some of his pleasantest

* The elder Scaliger had been banished from Verona, settled near Agen, and gave the villa its name. The tomb of the Scaliger family in Verona is one of the finest mausoleums ever erected.

hours, in exercise, in reflection, and in composition. In commemoration of his occupation of the site, he composed his *Ma Bigno*—'My Vineyard'—one of the most simple and graceful of his poems.

Jasmin dedicated *Ma Bigno* to Madame Louis Veill, of Paris. He told her of his purchase of Papillôte, a piece of ground which he had long desired to have, and which he had now been able to buy with the money gained by the sale of his poems.

He proceeds to describe the place:

"In this tiny little vineyard," he says, "my only chamber is a grotto. Nine cherry trees: such is my wood! I have six rows of vines, between which I walk and meditate. The peaches are mine; the hazel nuts are mine! I have two elms, and two fountains. I am indeed rich! You may laugh, perhaps, at my happiness. But I wish you to know that I love the earth and the sky. It is a living picture, sparkling in the sunshine. Come," he said, "and pluck my peaches from the branches; put them between your lovely teeth, whiter than the snow. Press them: from the skin to the almond they melt in the mouth—it is honey!" He next describes what he sees and hears from his grotto: the beautiful flowers, the fruit glowing in the sun, the luscious peaches, the notes of the woodlark, the zug-zug of the nightingale, the superb beauty of the heavens. "They all sing love, and love is always new."

He compares Paris, with its grand ladies and its

grand opera, with his vineyard and his nightingales. "Paris," he says, "has fine flowers and lawns, but she is too much of the *grande dame.* She is unhappy, sleepy. Here, a thousand hamlets laugh by the river's side. Our skies laugh; everything is happy; everything lives. From the month of May, when our joyous summer arrives, for six months the heavens resound with music. A thousand nightingales sing all the night through. . . . Your grand opera is silent, while our concert is in its fullest strain."

The poem ends with a confession on the part of the poet of sundry pilferings committed by himself in the same place when a boy—of apple-trees broken, hedges forced, and vine-ladders scaled, winding up with the words:

"Madame, you see I turn towards the past without a blush; will you? What I have robbed I return, and return with usury. I have no door to my vineyard; only two thorns bar its threshold. When, through a hole I see the noses of marauders, instead of arming myself with a cane, I turn and go away, so that they may come back. He who robbed when he was young, may in his old age allow himself to be robbed too." A most amicable sentiment, sure to be popular amongst the rising generation of Agen.

*Ma Bigno* is written in graceful and felicitous verse. We have endeavoured to give a translation in the appendix; but the rendering of such a work into English is extremely difficult. The soul will be

found wanting; for much of the elegance of the poem consists in the choice of the words. M. de Mazade, editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, said of *Ma Bigno* that it was one of Jasmin's best works, and that the style and sentiments were equally satisfactory to the poetical mind and taste.

M. Rodière, of Toulouse, in his brief memoir of Jasmin,* says that "it might be thought that so great a work as *Franconnette* would have exhausted the poet. When the aloe flowers, it rests for nearly a hundred years before it blooms again. But Jasmin had an inexhaustible well of poetry in his soul. Never in fact was he more prolific than in the two years which followed the publication of *Franconnette*. Poetry seemed to flow from him like a fountain, and it came in various forms." His poems have no rules and little rhythm, except those which the genius of the poet chooses to give them; but there is always the most beautiful poetry, perfectly evident by its divine light and its inspired accents."

Jasmin, however, did not compose with the rapidity described by his reviewer. He could not throw off a poem at one or many sittings; though he could write an impromptu with ready facility. When he had an elaborate work in hand, such as *The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé*, *Franconnette*, or *Martha the Innocent*, he meditated long over it, and elaborated it

* *Journal de Toulouse*, 4th July, 1840.

with conscientious care. He arranged the plan in his mind, and waited for the best words and expressions in which to elaborate his stanzas, so as most clearly to explain his true meaning. Thus *Franconnette* cost him two years' labour. Although he wrote of peasants in peasants' language, he took care to avoid everything gross or vulgar. Not even the most classical poet could have displayed inborn politeness—*la politesse du cœur*—in a higher degree. At the same time, while he expressed passion in many forms, it was always with delicacy, truth, and beauty.

Notwithstanding his constant philanthropic journeys, he beguiled his time with the germs of some forthcoming poem, ready to be elaborated on his return to Agen and his vineyard.

His second volume of poems was published in 1842, and in a few months it reached its third edition. About 20,000 copies of his poems had by this time been issued. The sale of these made him comparatively easy in his circumstances; and it was mainly by their profits that he was enabled to buy his little vineyard near Verona.

It may also be mentioned that Jasmin received a further increase of his means from the Government of Louis Philippe. Many of his friends in the South of France were of opinion that his philanthropic labours should be publicly recognised. While Jasmin had made numerous gifts to the poor from the collections made at his recitations; while he had helped to build

schools, orphanages, asylums, and even churches, it was thought that some recompense should be awarded to him by the State for his self-sacrificing labours.

In 1843 the Duchess of Orleans had a golden medal struck in his honour; and M. Dumon, when presenting it to Jasmin, announced that the Minister of Instruction had inscribed his name amongst the men of letters whose works the Government was desirous of encouraging; and that consequently a pension had been awarded to him of 1,000 francs per annum. This welcome news was shortly after confirmed by the Minister of Instruction himself. "I am happy," said M. Villemain, "to bear witness to the merit of your writings, and the originality of your poetry, as well as to the loyalty of your sentiments."

The minister was not, however, satisfied with conferring this favour. It was ordered that Jasmin should be made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, at the same time that Balzac, Frederick Soulie, and Alfred de Musset, were advanced to the same rôle of honour. The minister, in conveying the insignia to Jasmin, said.: "Your actions are equal to your works; you build churches; you succour indigence; you are a powerful benefactor; and your muse is the sister of Charity."

These unexpected honours made no difference in the poet's daily life. He shaved and curled hair as before. He lived in the same humble shop on the Gravier. He was not in the least puffed up. His additional income

merely enabled him to defray his expenses while on his charitable journeys on behalf of his poorer neighbours. He had no desire to be rich; and he was now more than comfortable in his position of life.

When the news arrived at Agen that Jasmin had been made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, his salon was crowded with sympathetic admirers. In the evening, a serenade was performed before his door on the Gravier by the Philharmonic Society of Agen. Indeed, the whole town was filled with joy at the acknowledged celebrity of their poet.

A few years later Pope Pius IX. conferred upon Jasmin the honour of Chevalier of the Order of St. Gregory the Great. The insignia of the Order was handed to the poet by Monseigneur de Vezins, Bishop of Agen, in Sept. 1850. Who could have thought that the barber-poet would have been so honoured by his King, and by the Head of his Church?

Jasmin's next important poem, after the production of *Franconnette* was *Martha the Innocent.*—[In Gascon, *Maltro l'Innoucento;* in French *Marthe la Folle*]. It is like *The Blind Girl,* a touching story of disappointment in love. Martha was an orphan living at Laffitte, on the banks of the Lot. She was betrothed to a young fellow, but the conscription forbade their union. The conscript was sent to the wars of the first Napoleon, which were then raging. The orphan sold her little cottage in the hope of buying him off, or providing him with a substitute.

But it was all in vain. He was compelled to follow his regiment.

She was a good and pious girl, beloved by all. She was also beautiful,—tall, fair, and handsome, with eyes of blue—"the blue of heaven," according to Jasmin:

> "With grace so fine, and air so sweet,
> She was a lady amongst peasants."

The war came to an end for a time. The soldier was discharged, and returned home.

Martha went out to meet him; but alas! like many other fickle men, he had met and married another. It was his wife who accompanied him homewards. Martha could not bear the terrible calamity of her blighted love. She became crazy—almost an idiot.

She ran away from her home at Laffitte, and wandered about the country. Jasmin, when a boy, had often seen the crazy woman wandering about the streets of Agen with a basket on her arm, begging for bread. Even in her rags she had the remains of beauty. The children ran after her, and cried, "Martha, a soldier!" then she ran off, and concealed herself.

Like other children of his age, Jasmin teased her; and now, after more than thirty years, he proposed to atone for his childish folly by converting her sad story into a still sadder poem.

*Martha the Innocent* is a charming poem, full of grace, harmony, and beauty. Jasmin often recited it, and drew tears from many eyes. In the introduction

he related his own part in her history. "It all came back upon him," he said, "and now he recited the story of this martyr of love." *

After the completion of *Martha,* new triumphs awaited Jasmin in the South of France. In 1846 he again went to Toulouse on a labour of love. He recited his new poem in the Room of the Illustrious at the Capitol. A brilliant assembly was present. Flowers perfumed the air. The entire audience rose and applauded the poet. The ladies smiled and wept by turns. Jasmin seemed to possess an electric influence. His clear, harmonious, and flexible voice, gave emphasis by its rich sympathetic tones to the artistic elements of his story.

The man who thus evoked such rapture from his audience was not arrayed in gorgeous costume. He

* In the preface to the poem, which was published in 1845, the editor observes:—"This little drama begins in 1798, at Laffitte, a pretty market-town on the banks of the Lot, near Clairac, and ends in 1802. When Martha became an idiot, she ran away from the town to which she belonged, and went to Agen. When seen in the streets of that town she became an object of commiseration to many, but the children pursued her, calling out, 'Martha, a soldier!' Sometimes she disappeared for two weeks at a time, and the people would then observe, 'Martha has hidden herself; she must now be very hungry!' More than once Jasmin, in his childhood, pursued Martha with the usual cry of 'A soldier.' He little thought that at a future time he should make some compensation for his sarcasms, by writing the touching poem of *Martha the Innocent;* but this merely revealed the goodness of his heart and his exquisite sensibility. Martha died at Agen in 1834."

was a little dark-eyed man of the working class, clothed in a quiet suit of black.

At the close of the recitation, the assembly, ravished with his performance, threw him a wreath of flowers and laurels—more modest, though not less precious than the golden branch which they had previously conferred upon him. Jasmin thanked them most heartily for their welcome. "My Muse," he said, "with its glorious branch of gold, little dreamt of gleaning anything more from Toulouse; but Toulouse has again invited me to this day's festival, and I feel more happy than a king, because my poem is enthroned in the midst of the Capitol. Your hands have applauded me throughout, and you have concluded by throwing this crown of flowers at my feet."

It was then resolved to invite Jasmin to a banquet. Forty ladies, the cream of Toulousian society, organised the proceedings, and the banquet was given at the palace of M. de Narbonne. At the end of the proceedings a young lady stepped forward, and placed upon the poet's head a crown of immortelles and violets joined together by a ribbon with golden threads, on which was inscribed in letters of gold, "Your thoughts are immortal!" Was not this enough to turn any poor poet's head? The ladies clapped their hands. What could Jasmin say? "It is enough," he said "to make angels jealous!" The dinner ended with a toast to the author of *Martha*, who still wore the crown upon his brow.

It is impossible to describe the enthusiasm with which the poet was received all through the South. At Dax, the ladies, for want of crowns of laurels to cover him, tore the flowers and feathers from their bonnets, and threw them at his feet. In another town the ladies rose and invaded the platform where Jasmin stood; they plucked from his button-hole the ribbon of the Legion of Honour, and divided it amongst them, as a precious relic of their glorious poet.

He was received at Gers and Condon with equal enthusiasm. At Condon he charmed his audience with his recitations for about five hours. Frenzies of applause greeted him. He was invited to a banquet, where he received the usual praises. When the banquet was over, and Jasmin escaped, he was met in the street by crowds of people, who wished to grasp him by the hand. He recited to them in the open air his poem of *Charity*. They compared Jasmin to O'Connell; but the barber of Agen, by the power which he exercised for the good of the people, proved himself more than equal to the greatest of agitators.

Sainte-Beuve quotes with keen enjoyment* the bantering letter which Jasmin sent to Peyrottes, a Provençal poet, who challenged him to a poetical combat. It was while he was making one of his charitable tours through Languedoc, that Jasmin received the following letter (24 December, 1847):—

* 'Causeries du Lundi,' iv. 241, edit. 1852.

"SIR,—I dare, in my temerity, which may look like hardihood, to propose to you a challenge. Will you have the goodness to accept it? In the Middle Ages, the Troubadours did not disdain such a challenge as that which, in my audacity, I now propose to you.

"I will place myself at your disposal at Montpellier on any day and at any hour that may be most convenient to you. We shall name four persons of literary standing to give us three subjects with which we are to deal for twenty-four hours. We shall be shut up together. Sentries will stand at the door. Only our provisions shall pass through.

"A son of Hérault, I will support the honour and the glory of my country! And as in such circumstances, a good object is indispensable, the three subjects given must be printed and sold for the benefit of the Crèche of Montpellier." Peyrotte ended his letter with a postscript, in which he said that he would circulate his challenge among the most eminent persons in Montpellier.

Jasmin answered this letter as follows:—

"SIR,—I did not receive your poetical challenge until the day before yesterday, on the point of my departure for home; but I must tell you that, though I have received it, I cannot accept it.

"Do you really propose to my muse, which aims at free air and liberty, to shut myself up in a close room, guarded by sentinels, who could only allow provisions to enter, and there to treat of three given subjects in

twenty-four hours! Three subjects in twenty-four hours! You frighten me, sir, for the peril in which you place my muse.

"I must inform you, in all humility, that I often cannot compose more than two or three lines a day. My five poems, *L'Aveugle*, *Mes Souvenirs*, *Franconnette*, *Martha the Innocent*, and *Les Deux Jumeaux*, have cost me ten years' work, and they only contain in all but 2,400 verses! . . . I cannot write poetry by command. I cannot be a prisoner while I compose. Therefore I decline to enter the lists with you.

"The courser who drags his chariot with difficulty, albeit he may arrive at the goal, cannot contend with the fiery locomotive of the iron railway. The art which produces verses one by one, depends upon inspiration, not upon manufacture. Therefore my muse declares itself vanquished in advance; and I authorise you to publish my refusal of your challenge."

In a postscript, Jasmin added: "Now that you have made the acquaintance of my Muse, I will, in a few words, introduce you to the man. I love glory, but the success of others never troubles my sleep at night!"

"When one finds," says Sainte-Beuve, "this theory of work pushed to such a degree by Jasmin, with whom the spark of inspiration seems always so prompt and natural, what a sad return we have of the poetical wealth dissipated by the poets of our day." Sainte-Beuve summed up his praise of the Gascon poet by insisting that he was invariably sober in his tone.

"I have learned," said Jasmin of himself, "that in moments of heat and emotion we may be eloquent or laconic, alike in speech and action—unconscious poets, in fact; but I have also learned that it is possible for a poet to become all this voluntarily by dint of patient toil and conscientious labour!"

Jasmin was not the man to rest upon his laurels. Shortly after his visit to Paris in 1842, he began to compose his *Martha the Innocent*, which we have already briefly described. Two years later he composed *Les Deux Frères Jumeaux*—a story of paternal and motherly affection. This was followed by his *Ma Bigno* ('My Vineyard'), and *La Semaine d'un Fils* ('The Week's Work of a Son'), which a foot-note tells us is historical, the event having recently occurred in the neighbourhood of Agen.

A short description may be given of this affecting story. The poem is divided into three parts. In the first, a young boy and his sister, Abel and Jeanne, are described as kneeling before a cross in the moonlight, praying to the Virgin to cure their father. "Mother of God, Virgin compassionate, send down thine Angel and cure our sick father. Our mother will then be happy, and we, Blessed Virgin, will love and praise thee for ever."

The Virgin hears their prayer, and the father is cured. A woman opens the door of a neighbouring house and exclaims joyously, "Poor little ones, death has departed. The poison of the fever is counteracted,

and your father's life is saved. Come, little lambs, and pray to God with me." They all three kneel and pray by the side of the good father Hilaire, formerly a brave soldier, but now a mason's labourer. This ends the first part.

The second begins with a description of morning. The sun shines through the glass of the casement mended with paper, yet the morning rays are bright and glorious. Little Abel glides into his father's room. He is told that he must go to the house of his preceptor to-day, for he must learn to read and write. Abel is "more pretty than strong;" he is to be an *homme de lettres*, as his little arms would fail him if he were to handle the rough stones of his father's trade. Father and son embraced each other.

For a few days all goes well, but on the fourth, a Sunday, a command comes from the master mason that if Hilaire does not return to his work to-morrow, his place shall be given to another. This news spreads dismay and consternation among them all. Hilaire declares that he is cured, tries to rise from his bed, but falls prostrate through weakness. It will take a week yet to re-establish his health.

The soul of little Abel is stirred. He dries his tears and assumes the air of a man; he feels some strength in his little arms. He goes out, and proceeds to the house of the master mason. When he returns, he is no longer sorrowful: "honey was in his mouth, and his eyes were smiling." He said, "My father, rest yourself: gain

strength and courage; you have the whole week before you. Then you may labour. Some one who loves you will do your work, and you shall still keep your place." Thus ends the second part.

The third begins: "Behold our little Abel, who no longer toils at the school-desk, but in the workshop. In the evenings he becomes again a *petit monsieur*; and, the better to deceive his father, speaks of books, papers, and writings, and with a wink replies to the inquiring look of his mother (*et d'un clin d'œil répond aux clins des yeux de sa mère*). Four days pass thus. On the fifth, Friday, Hilaire, now cured, leaves his house at mid-day. "But fatal Friday, God has made thee for sorrow!"

The father goes to the place where the masons are at work. Though the hour for luncheon has not arrived, yet no one is seen on the platforms above; and *O bon Dieu!* what a crowd of people is seen at the foot of the building! Master, workmen, neighbours—all are there, in haste and tumult. A workman has fallen from the scaffold. It is poor little Abel. Hilaire pressed forward to see his beloved boy lie bleeding on the ground. Abel is dying, but before he expires, he whispers, "Master, I have not been able to finish the work; but for my poor mother's sake do not dismiss my father because there is one day short!" The boy died, and was carried home by his sorrowful parent. The place was preserved for Hilaire, and his wages were even doubled. But it was too late. One morning death closed his eyelids; and the good father went

to take another place—in the tomb by the side of his son.

Jasmin dedicated this poem to Lamartine, who answered his dedication as follows:—

"PARIS, 28*th April*, 1849.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—I am proud to read my name in the language which you have made classic; more proud still of the beautiful verses in which you embalm the recollection of our three months of struggle with the demagogues against our true republic. Poets entertain living presentiments of posterity. I accept your omen. Your poem has made us weep. You are the only epic writer of our time, the sensible and pathetic Homer of the people (*prolétaires*). Others sing, but you feel. I have seen your son, who has three times sheltered me with his bayonet—in March and April. He appears to me worthy of your name.—LAMARTINE."

Besides the above poems, Jasmin composed *Le Prêtre sans Eglise* (The Priest without a Church), which forms the subject of the next chapter. These poems, with other songs and impromptus, were published in 1851, forming the third volume of his *Papillôtos*. After Jasmin had completed his masterpieces, he again devoted himself to the cause of charity. Before, he had merely walked; now he soared aloft. What he accomplished will be ascertained in the following pages.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE PRIEST WITHOUT A CHURCH.

THE Abbé Masson, priest of Vergt in Périgord, found the church in which he officiated so decayed and crumbling, that he was obliged to close it. It had long been in a ruinous condition. The walls were cracked, and pieces of plaster and even brick fell down upon the heads of the congregation; and for their sake as well as for his own, the Abbé Masson was obliged to discontinue the services. At length he resolved to pull down the ruined building, and erect another church in its place.

Vergt is not a town of any considerable importance. It contains the ruins of a fortress built by the English while this part of France was in their possession. At a later period a bloody battle was fought in the neighbourhood between the Catholics and the Huguenots. Indeed, the whole of the South of France was for a long period disturbed by the civil war which raged between these sections of Christians. Though both Roman Catholics and Protestants still exist at Vergt, they now live together in peace and harmony.

Vergt is the chief town of the Canton, and con-

tains about 1800 inhabitants. It is a small but picturesque town, the buildings being half concealed by foliage and chestnut trees. Not far off, by the river Candou, the scenery reminds one of the wooded valley at Bolton Priory in Yorkshire.

Though the Abbé Masson was a man of power and vigour, he found it very difficult to obtain funds from the inhabitants of the town for the purpose of rebuilding his church. There were no Ecclesiastical Commissioners to whom he could appeal, and the people of the neighbourhood were too limited in their circumstances to help him to any large extent.

However, he said to himself, "Heaven helps those who help themselves;" or rather, according to the Southern proverb, *Qui trabaillo, Thion li baillo*—"Who is diligent, God helps." The priest began his work with much zeal. He collected what he could in Vergt and the neighbourhood, and set the builders to work. He hoped that Providence would help him in collecting the rest of the building fund.

But the rebuilding of a church is a formidable affair; and perhaps the priest, not being a man of business, did not count the cost of the undertaking. He may have "counted his chickens before they were hatched." Before long the priest's funds again ran short. He had begun the rebuilding in 1840; the work went on for about a year; but in 1841 the builders had to stop their operations, as the Abbé Masson's funds were entirely exhausted.

What was he to do now? He suddenly remembered the barber of Agen, who was always willing to give his friendly help. He had established Mdlle. Roaldés as a musician a few years before; he had helped to build schools, orphanages, asylums, and such like. But he had never helped to build a church. Would he now help him to rebuild the church of Vergt?

The Abbé did not know Jasmin personally, but he went over to Agen, and through a relative, made his acquaintance. Thus the Abbé and the poet came together. After the priest had made an explanation of his position, and of his difficulties in obtaining money for the rebuilding of the church of Vergt, Jasmin at once complied with the request that he would come over and help him. They arranged for a circuit of visits throughout the district—the priest with his address, and Jasmin with his poems.

Jasmin set out for Vergt in January 1843. He was received at the border of the Canton by a numerous and brilliant escort of cavalry, which accompanied him to the presbytery. He remained there for two days, conferring with the Abbé. Then the two set out together for Périgueux, the chief city of the province, accompanied on their departure by the members of the Municipal Council and the leading men of the town.

The first meeting was held in the theatre of Périgueux, which was crowded from floor to ceiling, and many remained outside who could not obtain admission. The Mayor and Municipal Councillors were present to

welcome and introduce the poet. On this occasion, Jasmin recited for the first time, "The Ruined Church" (in Gascon: *La Glèyzo Descapelado*) composed in one of his happiest moments. Jasmin compared himself to Amphion, the sweet singer of Greece, who by his musical powers, enabled a city to be built; and now the poet invoked the citizens of Périgueux to enable the Abbé Masson to rebuild his church. His poem was received with enthusiasm, and almost with tears of joy at the pleading of Jasmin. There was a shower of silver and gold. The priest was overjoyed at the popularity of his colleague, and also at his purse, which was filled with offerings.

While at Périgueux the poet and the priest enjoyed the hospitality of M. August Dupont, to whom Jasmin, in thanks, dedicated a piece of poetry. Other entertainments followed—matinées and soirées. Jasmin recited some of his poems before the professors and students at the college, and at other places of public instruction. Then came banquets—aristocratic and popular—and, as usual, a banquet of the hair-dressers. There was quite an ovation in the city while he remained there.

But other calls awaited Jasmin. He received deputations from many of the towns in the department soliciting his appearance, and the recitation of his poems. He had to portion out his time with care, and to arrange the programme of his visits. When the two pilgrims started on their journey, they were frequently

interrupted by crowds of people, who would not allow Jasmin to pass without reciting some of his poetry. Jasmin and Masson travelled by the post-office car—the cheapest of all conveyances—but at Montignac they were stopped by a crowd of people, and Jasmin had to undergo the same process. Free and hearty, he was always willing to comply with their requests. That day the postman arrived at his destination three hours after his appointed time.

It was in the month of February, when darkness comes on so quickly, that Jasmin informed the magistrates of Sarlat, whither he was bound, that he would be there by five o'clock. But they waited, and waited for him and the priest at the entrance to the town, attended by the clergy, the sub-prefect, the town councillors, and a crowd of people. It was a cold and dreary night. Still no Jasmin! They waited for three long hours. At last Jasmin appeared on the post-office car. "There he comes at last!" was the general cry. His arrival was greeted with enthusiastic cheers. It was now quite dark. The poet and the priest entered Sarlat in triumph, amidst the glare of torches and the joyful shouts of the multitude. Then came the priest's address, Jasmin's recitations, and the final collection of offerings.

It is unnecessary to repeat the scenes, however impressive, which occurred during the journey of the poet and the priest. There was the same amount of enthusiasm at Nontron, Bergerac, and the other towns

which they visited. At Nontron, M. A. de Calvimont, the sub-prefect, welcomed Jasmin with the following lines:

"To Jasmin, *our* grand poet,
The painter of humanity;
For him, elect of heaven, life is a *fête*
Ending in immortality."

Jasmin replied to this with some impromptu lines, 'To Poetry,' dedicated to the sub-prefect. At Bergerac he wrote his *Adieu to Périgord,* in which he conveyed his thanks to the inhabitants of the department for the kindness with which they had received him and his companion. This, their first journey through Périgord, was brought to a close at the end of February, 1843.

The result of this brilliant journey was very successful. The purse of the Abbé was now sufficiently well filled to enable him to proceed with the rebuilding of the church of Vergt; and the work was so well advanced, that by the 23rd of the following month of July it was ready for consecration. A solemn ceremony then took place. Six bishops, including an archbishop, and three hundred priests were present, with more than fifteen thousand people of all ranks and conditions of life. Never had such a ceremony been seen before—at least in so small a town.

The Cardinal Gousset, Archbishop of Rheims, after consecrating the church, turned to Jasmin, and said:

"Poet, we cannot avoid the recognition of your self-

sacrificing labours in the rebuilding of this church; and we shall be happy if you will consent to say a few words before we part."

"Monseigneur," replied Jasmin, "can you believe that my muse has laboured for fifteen days and fifteen nights, that I should interrupt this day of the fête? Vergt keeps fête to-day for religion, but not for poetry, though it welcomes and loves it. The church has six pontiffs; the poet is only a subdeacon; but if I must sing my hymn officially, it must be elsewhere."

The Archbishop—a man of intelligence who understood the feelings of poets—promised, at the collation which followed the consecration, to give Jasmin the opportunity of reciting the verses which he had composed for the occasion. The poem was entitled 'A Priest without a Church' (in Gascon: *Lou Prêste sans Glèyzo*) dedicated to M. Masson, the Curè of Vergt. In his verses the poet described the influence of a noble church upon the imagination as well as the religion of the people. But he said nothing of his own labours in collecting the necessary funds for the rebuilding of the church. The recitation of the poem was received with enthusiasm.

Monseigneur Bertaud, who preached in the afternoon on the "Infinity of God," touchingly referred to the poems of Jasmin, and developed the subject so happily referred to by the poet.

"Such examples as his," he said, "such delicate and generous sentiments mingled together, elevate poetry

and show its noble origin, so that we cannot listen to him without the gravest emotion."*

It was a great day for Vergt, and also a great day for the poet. The consecration of the church amidst so large an assemblage of clergy and people occasioned great excitement in the South. It was noised abroad in the public journals, and even in the foreign press. Jasmin's fame became greater than ever; and his barber's shop at Agen became, as it were, a shrine, where pilgrims, passing through the district, stopped to visit him and praise his almost divine efforts to help the cause of religion and civilisation.

The local enthusiasm was not, however, without its drawbacks. The success of the curate of Vergt occasioned a good deal of jealousy. Why should he be patronised by Jasmin, and have his purse filled by his recitations, when there were so many other churches to be built and repaired, so many hospitals and schools to found and maintain, so many orphanages to assist, so many poor to relieve, so many good works to be done? Why should not Jasmin, who could coin money with words which cost him nothing, come to the help of the needy and afflicted in the various districts throughout the South?

Thus Jasmin was constantly assailed by deputations. He must leave his razors and his curling-tongs, and

* The whole of the interview between the Archbishop of Rheims and Jasmin is given by Sainte-Beuve in 'Causeries du Lundi,' iv. 250.

go here, there, and everywhere to raise money by his recitations.

The members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul were, as usual, full of many charitable designs. There had been a fire, a flood, an epidemic, a severe winter, a failure of crops, which had thrown hundreds of families into poverty and misery; and Jasmin must come immediately to their succour. "Come, Jasmin! Come quick, quick!" He was always willing to give his assistance; but it was a terrible strain upon his mental as well as his physical powers.

In all seasons, at all hours, in cold, in heat, in wind, in rain, he hastened to give his recitations—sometimes of more than two hours' duration, and often twice or thrice in the same day. He hastened, for fear lest the poor should receive their food and firing too late.

What a picture! Had Jasmin lived in the time of St. Vincent de Paul, the saint would have embraced him a thousand times, and rejoiced to see himself in one way surpassed; for in pleading for the poor, he also helped the rich by celebrating the great deeds of their ancestors, as he did at Béziers, Riquet, Albi, Lafeyrouse, and other places. The spectacle which he presented was so extraordinary, that all France was struck with admiration at the qualities of this noble barber of Agen.

On one occasion Jasmin was requested by a curate to come to his help and reconcile him with his parishioners. Jasmin succeeded in performing the miracle. It happened that in 1846 the curate of Saint-Léger, near

Penne, in the Tarn, had caused a ball-room to be closed. This gave great offence to the young people, who desired the ball-room to be opened, that they might have their fill of dancing. They left his church, and declared that they would have nothing further to do with him. To reconcile the malcontents, the curate promised to let them hear Jasmin. Accordingly, one Sunday afternoon the inhabitants of four parishes assembled in a beautiful wood to listen to Jasmin. He recited his *Charity* and some other of his serious poems. When he had finished, the young people of Saint-Léger embraced first the poet, and then the curate. The reconciliation was complete.

To return to the church at Vergt. Jasmin was a poet, not an architect. The Abbé Masson knew nothing about stone or mortar. He was merely anxious to have his church rebuilt and consecrated as soon as possible. That had been done in 1843. But in the course of a few years it was found that the church had been very badly built. The lime was bad, and the carpentry was bad. The consequence was, that the main walls of the church bulged out, and the shoddy building had to be supported by outside abutments. In course of time it became clear that the work, for the most part, had to be done over again.

In 1847 the Abbé again appealed to Jasmin. This new task was more difficult than the first, for it was necessary to appeal to a larger circle of contributors;

not confining themselves to Périgord only, but taking a wider range throughout the South of France. The priest made the necessary arrangements for the joint tour. They would first take the northern districts —Angoulême, Limoges, Tulle, and Brives—and then proceed towards the south.

The pair started at the beginning of May, and began their usual recitations and addresses, such as had been given during the first journey in Périgord. They were received with the usual enthusiasm. Prefects, bishops, and municipal bodies, vied with each other in receiving and entertaining them. At Angoulême, the queen of southern cities, Jasmin was presented with a crown of *immortelles* and a snuff-box, on which was engraved: "Esteem—Love—Admiration! To Jasmin, the most sublime of poets! From the youth of Angoulême, who have had the happiness of seeing and hearing him!"

The poet and priest travelled by night as well as by day in order to economise time. After their tour in the northern towns and cities, they returned to Vergt for rest. They entered the town under a triumphal arch, and were escorted by a numerous cavalcade. Before they retired to the priest's house, the leading men of the commune, in the name of the citizens, complimented Jasmin for his cordial help towards the rebuilding of the church.

After two days of needful rest Jasmin set out for Bordeaux, the city whose inhabitants had first encouraged him by their applause, and for which he

continued to entertain a cordial feeling to the last days of his life. His mission on this occasion was to assist in the inauguration of a crèche, founded and supported by the charitable contributions of the friends of poor children. It is not necessary to mention the enthusiasm with which he was received.

The further progress of the poet and the priest, in search of contributions for rebuilding the church, was rudely interrupted by the Revolution which broke out at Paris in 1848. His Majesty Louis Philippe abdicated the throne of France on the 24th of February, rather than come into armed collision with his subjects; and, two days after, the Republic was officially proclaimed at the Hôtel de Ville. Louis Philippe and his family took refuge in England—the usual retreat of persecuted Frenchmen; and nine months later, Louis Napoleon Buonaparte, who had also been a refugee in England, returned to France, and on the 20th of December was proclaimed President of the French Republic.

Jasmin and Masson accordingly suspended their tour. No one would listen to poetical recitations in the midst of political revolutions. Freedom and tranquillity were necessary for the contemplation of ideas very different from local and national squabbles. The poet and priest accordingly bade adieu to each other; and it was not until two years later that they were able to recommence their united journeys through the South of France.

The proclamation of the Republic, and the forth-

coming elections, brought many new men to the front. Even poets made their appearance. Lamartine, who had been a deputy, was a leader in the Revolution, and for a time was minister for foreign affairs. Victor Hugo, a still greater poet, took a special interest in the politics of the time, though he was fined and imprisoned for condemning capital punishment. Even Reboul, the poet-baker of Nîmes, deserted his muse and his kneading trough to solicit the suffrages of his fellow-citizens. Jasmin was wiser. He was more popular in his neighbourhood than Reboul, though he cared little about politics. He would neither be a deputy, nor a municipal councillor, nor an agent for elections. He preferred to influence his country by spreading the seeds of domestic and social virtues; and he was satisfied with his position in Agen as poet and hair-dresser.

Nevertheless a deputation of his townsmen waited upon Jasmin to request him to allow his name to appear as a candidate for their suffrages. The delegates did not find him at his shop. He was at his vineyard; and there the deputation found him tranquilly seated under a cherry-tree *shelling peas!* He listened to them with his usual courtesy, and when one of the committee pressed him for an answer, and wished to know if he was not a good Republican, he said, "Really, I care nothing for the Republic. I am one of those who would have saved the constitutional monarchy by enabling it to carry out further reforms. . . . But," he continued, "look to the past; was it not a loss to

destroy the constitutional monarchy? But now we must march forward, that we may all be united again under the same flag. The welfare of France should reign in all our thoughts and evoke our most ardent sympathy. Choose among our citizens a strong and wise man. . . . If the Republic is to live in France, it must be great, strong, and good for all classes of the people. Maintaining the predominance of the law will be its security; and in preserving law it will strengthen our liberties."

In conclusion, Jasmin cordially thanked his fellow-citizens for the honour they proposed to confer upon him, although he could not accept it. The affairs of the State, he said, were in a very confused condition, and he could not pretend to unravel them. He then took leave of the deputation, and quietly proceeded to complete his task—the shelling of his peas!

## CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHURCH OF VERGT AGAIN—FRENCH ACADEMY—EMPEROR AND EMPRESS.

WHEN the political turmoils in France had for a time subsided, Jasmin and the Abbé Masson recommenced their journeys in the South for the collection of funds for the church at Vergt. They had already made two pilgrimages—the first through Périgord, the second to Angoulême, Limoges, Tulle, and Brives. The third was begun early in 1850, and included the department of the Landes, the higher and lower Pyrenees, and other districts in the South of France.

At Bagnères de Bigorre and at Bagnères de Luchon the receipts were divided between the church at Vergt and that at Luchon. The public hospitals and the benevolent societies frequently shared in the receipts. There seemed to be no limits to the poet's zeal in labouring for those who were in want of funds. Independent of his recitations for the benefit of the church at Vergt, he often turned aside to one place or another where the poor were in the greatest need of assistance.

On one occasion he went to Arcachon. He started early

in the morning by the steamer from Agen to Bordeaux, intending to proceed by railway (a five hours' journey) from Bordeaux to Arcachon. But the steamers on the Garonne were then very irregular, and Jasmin did not reach Bordeaux until six hours later than the appointed time. In the meanwhile a large assembly had met in the largest room in Arcachon. They waited and waited; but no Jasmin! The Abbé Masson became embarrassed; but at length he gave his address, and the receipts were 800 francs. The meeting dispersed very much disappointed, because no Jasmin had appeared, and they missed his recitations. At midnight the curé returned to Bordeaux, and there he found Jasmin, just arrived from Agen by the boat, which had been six hours late. He was in great dismay; but he afterwards made up for the disappointment by reciting to the people of Arcachon.

The same thing happened at Biarritz. A large assembly had met, and everything was ready for Jasmin. But there was no Jasmin! The omnibus from Bayonne did not bring him. It turned out, that at the moment of setting out he was seized with a sudden loss of voice. As in the case of Arcachon, the curé had to do without him. The result of his address was a collection of 700 francs.

The Abbé Masson was a liberal-minded man. When Jasmin urged him to help others more needy than himself, he was always ready to comply with his request. When at Narbonne, in the department of

Aude, a poor troupe of comedians found themselves in difficulties. It was winter-time, and the weather was very cold. The public could not bear their canvas-covered shed, and deserted the entertainment. Meanwhile the artistes were famished. Knowing the generosity of Jasmin, they asked him to recite at one of their representations. He complied with their request; the place was crowded; and Jasmin's recitations were received with the usual enthusiasm. It had been arranged that half the proceeds should go to the church at Vergt, and the other half to the comedians. But when the entire troupe presented themselves to the Abbé and offered him the full half, he said: "No! no! keep it all. You want it more than I do. Besides, I can always fall back upon my dear poet!"

A fourth pilgrimage of the priest and poet was afterwards made to the towns of Rodez, Villefranche-d'Aveyron, Cahors, Figeac, Gourdon, and Sarlat; and the proceeds of these excursions, added to a subvention of 5,000 francs from the Government, enabled the church of Vergt to be completed. In 1852 the steeple was built, and appropriately named "Jasmin's Bell-tower" (*Clocher Jasmin*). But it was still without bells, for which a subsequent pilgrimage was made by Jasmin and Masson.

To return to the honours paid to Jasmin for his works of benevolence and charity. What was worth more to him than the numerous golden laurels which had been bestowed upon him, was his recognition by the highest

and noblest of institutions, the Academy of France. Although one of the objects of its members was to preserve the French language in its highest purity, they were found ready to crown a poet who wrote his poems in the patois of the South.

There were, however, several adverse criticisms on the proposed decision of the Academy; though poetry may be written in every tongue, and is quite independent of the language or patois in which it is conveyed. Indeed, several members of the Academy—such as MM. Thiers, De Rémusat, Viennet, and Flourens—came from the meridional districts of France, and thoroughly understood the language of Jasmin. They saw in him two men—the poet, and the benefactor of humanity.

This consideration completely overruled the criticisms of the minority. Jasmin had once before appeared at M. Thierry's before the best men of the Academy; and now the whole of the Academy, notwithstanding his patois, approached and honoured the man of good deeds.

Jasmin owed to M. Villemain one of the most brilliant panegyrics which he had ever received. The Academy desired to award a special prize in accordance with the testamentary bequest of M. de Montyon *—

* The Baron de Montyon bequeathed a large sum to the Académie Française, the Académie des Sciences, and the Faculté de Médecine, for the purpose of being awarded in prizes to men of invention and discovery, or for any literary work likely to be useful to society, and to rewarding acts of virtue among the poor. Jasmin was certainly entitled to a share in this benevolent fund.

his last debt to art and morality; a talent that employs itself in doing good under a form the most brilliant and popular. This talent, he continued, is that of the true poet; and Jasmin, during his pure and modest life, has employed his art for the benefit of morality with a noble, helpful influence, while nothing detracted from the dignity of his name.

Like the Scottish poet Burns, Jasmin had by his dialect and his poetical talents enriched the literature of his country. Jasmin, the hair-dresser of Agen, the poet of the South, who drew crowds to hear the sound of his voice—who even embellished the festivals of the rich, but who still more assisted in the pleasures of the poor—who spent his time in endowing charitable establishments—who helped to build churches, schools, and orphanages—Jasmin, the glory of his Commune as well as of the South of France, deserved to be adopted by all France and publicly acknowledged by the Academy.

Tacitus has said that renown is not always deserved, it chooses its due time—*Non semper errat fama, aliquando eligit* ("Fame is not always mistaken; she sometimes chooses the right"). We have proof of it to-day. The enthusiastic approbation of the great provinces of France for a popular poet cannot be a surprise. They single out the last, and I may add, the greatest poet of the Troubadours!

M. Villemain proceeded to comment upon the poetical works of Jasmin—especially his *Blind Girl*

*of Castel-Cuillé,* his *Franconnette,* and the noble works he had done for the poor and the suffering; his self-sacrificing labours for the building of schools, orphanages, and churches. "Everywhere," he said, "his elevated and generous soul has laboured for the benefit of the world about him; and now he would, by the aid of the Academy, embellish his coronet with a privileged donation to the poet and philanthropist." He concluded by saying that the especial prize for literary morality and virtuous actions would be awarded to him, and that a gold medal would be struck in his honour with the inscription: "*Au Jasmin, Poète moral et populaire!*"

M. Ancelo communicated to Jasmin the decision of the Academy. "I have great pleasure," he said, "in transmitting to you the genuine sympathy, the sincere admiration, and the unanimous esteem, which your name and your works have evoked at this meeting of the Academy. The legitimate applause which you everywhere receive in your beautiful country finds its echo on this side of the Loire; and if the spontaneous adoption of you by the French Academy adds nothing to your glory, it will at least serve to enhance our own."

The prize unanimously awarded to Jasmin on the 19th of August, 1852, was 3000 francs, which was made up to 5000 by the number of copies of the "Papillôtos" purchased by the Academy for distribution amongst the members. Jasmin devoted part of the money to repairing his little house on the Gravier: and the rest was ready for his future charitable missions.

On receiving the intimation of the prizes awarded to him, he made another journey to Paris to pay his respects to his devoted friends of the Academy. He was received with welcome by the most eminent persons in the metropolis. He was fêted as usual. At the salon of the Marquis de Barthélemy he met the Duc de Levis, the Duc des Cars, MM. Berryer, de Salvandy, de Vatisménil, Hyde de Neuville, and other distinguished noblemen and gentlemen.

Monsigneur Sibour, Archbishop of Paris, was desirous of seeing and hearing this remarkable poet of the South. The Archbishop invited him to his palace for the purpose of hearing a recitation of his poems; and there he met the Pope's Nuncio, several bishops, and the principal members of the Parisian clergy. After the recitation, the Archbishop presented Jasmin with a golden branch with this device: "To Jasmin! the greatest of the Troubadours, past, present, or to come."

The chief authors of Paris, the journalists, and the artists, had a special meeting in honour of Jasmin. A banquet was organised by the journalists of the *Deux Mondes*, at the instance of Meissonier, Lireux, Lalandelle, C. Reynaud, L. Pichat, and others. M. Jules Janin presided, and complimented Jasmin in the name of the Parisian press. The people of Agen, resident in Paris, also gave him a banquet, at which Jasmin recited a poem composed for the occasion.

One of his evenings was spent at the house of Madame la Marquise de Barthélemy. An interesting

account of the soirée is given by a correspondent of *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, who was present on the occasion.* The salons of Madame la Marquise were filled to overflowing. Many of the old nobility of France were present. "It was a St. Germain's night," as she herself expressed it. High-sounding names were there—much intellect and beauty; all were assembled to do honour to the coiffeur from the banks of the Garonne. France honours intellect, no matter to what class of society it belongs: it is an affectionate kind of social democracy. Indeed, among many virtues in French society, none is so delightful, none so cheering, none so mutually improving, and none more Christian, than the kindly intercourse, almost the equality, of all ranks of society, and the comparatively small importance attached to wealth or condition, wherever there is intellect and power.

At half-past nine Jasmin made his appearance—a short, stout, dark-haired man, with large bright eyes, and a mobile animated face, his button-hole decorated with the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour. He made his way through the richly attired ladies sparkling with jewels, to a small table at the upper end of the salon, whereon were books, his own "Curl-papers," two candles, a carafe of fresh water, and a vase of flowers.

The ladies arranged themselves in a series of brilliant

* *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, July, 1853.

semicircles before him. The men blocked up the doorway, peering over each other's shoulders. Jasmin waved his hand like the leader of an orchestra, and a general silence sealed all the fresh noisy lips. One haughty little brunette, not long emancipated from her convent, giggled audibly; but Jasmin's eye transfixed her, and the poor child sat thereafter rebuked and dumb. The hero of the evening again waved his hands, tossed back his hair, struck an attitude, and began his poem. The first he recited was "The Priest without a Church" (*Le Prèste sans glèyzo*). He pleaded for the church as if it were about to be built. He clasped his hands, looked up to heaven, and tears were in his eyes. Some sought for the silver and gold in their purses; but no collection was made, as the church had already been built, and was free of debt.

After an interval, he recited *La Semaine d'un Fils;* and he recited it very beautifully. There were some men who wept; and many women who exclaimed, "*Charmant! Tout-à-fait charmant!*" but who did not weep. Jasmin next recited *Ma Bigno*, which has been already described. The contributor to *Chambers's Journal* proceeds: "It was all very amusing to a proud, stiff, reserved Britisher like myself, to see how grey-headed men with stars and ribbons could cry at Jasmin's reading; and how Jasmin, himself a man, could sob and wipe his eyes, and weep so violently, and display such excessive emotion. This surpassed my understanding—probably clouded by the chill atmosphere

of the fogs, in which every Frenchman believes we live. . . . After the recitations had concluded, Jasmin's social ovation began. Ladies surrounded him, and men admired him. A ring was presented, and a pretty speech spoken by a pretty mouth, accompanied the presentation; and the man of the people was flattered out of all proportion by the brave, haughty old *noblesse.*

"To do Jasmin justice, although naturally enough spoiled by the absurd amount of adulation he has met with, he has not been made cold-hearted or worldly. He is vain, but true and loyal to his class. He does not seek to disguise or belie his profession. In fact, he always dwells upon his past more or less, and never misses an opportunity of reminding his audience that he is but a plebeian, after all.

"He wears a white apron, and shaves and frizzes hair to this day, when at Agen; and though a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, member of Academies and Institutes without number, fêted, praised, flattered beyond anything we can imagine in England, crowned by the king and the then heir to the throne with gilt and silver crowns, decked with flowers and oak-leaves, and all conceivable species of coronets, he does not ape the gentleman, but clips, curls, and chatters as simply as heretofore, and as professionally. There is no little merit in this steady attachment to his native place, and no little good sense in this adherence to his old profession . . . It is far manlier and nobler than that

weak form of vanity shown in a slavish imitation of the great, and a cowardly shame of one's native condition.

"Without going so far as his eulogistic admirers in the press, yet we honour in him a true poet, and a true man, brave, affectionate, mobile, loving, whose very faults are all amiable, and whose vanity takes the form of nature. And if we of the cold North can scarcely comprehend the childish passionateness and emotional unreserve of the more sensitive South, at least we can profoundly respect the good common to us all—the good which lies underneath that many-coloured robe of manners which changes with every hamlet; the good which speaks from heart to heart, and quickens the pulses of the blood; the good which binds us all as brothers, and makes but one family of universal man; and this good we lovingly recognise in Jasmin; and while rallying him for his foibles, respectfully love him for his virtues, and tender him a hand of sympathy and admiration as a fine poet, a good citizen, and a true-hearted man."

Before leaving Paris it was necessary for Jasmin to acknowledge his gratitude to the French Academy. The members had done him much honour by the gold medal and the handsome donation they had awarded him. On the 24th of August, 1852, he addressed the Forty of the Academy in a poem which he entitled 'Langue Française, Langue Gasconne,' or, as he styled it in Gascon, '*Lengo Gascouno, Lengo Francezo.*' In

this poem, which was decorated with the most fragrant flowers of poetry with which he could clothe his words, Jasmin endeavoured to disclose the characteristics of the two languages. At the beginning, he said: "O my birth-place, what a concert delights my ear! Nightingales, sing aloud; bees, hum together; Garonne, make music on your pure and laughing stream; the elms of Gravier, tower above me; not for glory, but for gladness." *

After the recitation of the poem, M. Laurentie said that it abounded in patriotic sentiments and fine appreciation, to say nothing of the charming style of the falling strophes, at intervals, in their sonorous and lyrical refrain. M. Villemain added his acclamation. "In truth, said he, "once more our Academy is indebted to Jasmin!" The poet, though delighted by these ovations, declared that it was he who was indebted to the members of the Academy, not they to him. M. de Salvandy reassured him: "Do not trouble yourself, Jasmin; you have accomplished everything we could have wished; you have given us ten for one, and still we are your debtors."

After Jasmin had paid his compliments to the French

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The following are the Gascon words of this part of the poem:

"O moun brès, d'un councèr festejo moun aoureillo!
Rouseignol, canto fort! brounzino fort, Abeillo!
Carôno, fay souna toun flot rizen et pur;
Des ourmes del Grabè floureji la cabeillo,
Non de glôrio!. . . mais de bounhur!"

Academy, he was about to set out for Agen—being fatigued and almost broken down by his numerous entertainments in Paris—when he was invited by General Fleury to visit the President of the French Republic at Saint-Cloud. This interview did not please him so much as the gracious reception which he had received in the same palace some years before from Louis Philippe and the Duchess of Orleans; yet Jasmin was a man who respected the law, and as France had elected Louis Napoleon as President, he was not unwilling to render him his homage.

Jasmin had already seen the President when passing through Agen a few years before, on his visit to Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Toulon; but they had no personal interview. M. Edmond Texier, however, visited Jasmin, and asked him whether he had not composed a hymn for the fête of the day. No! he had composed nothing; yet he had voted for Louis Napoleon, believing him to be the saviour of France. "But," said M. Texier, "if the Prince appeals to you, you will eulogise him in a poem?" "Certainly," replied Jasmin, "and this is what I would say: 'Sir, in the name of our country, restore to us our noble friend M. Baze. He was your adversary, but he is now conquered, disarmed, and most unhappy. Restore him to his mother, now eighty years old; to his weeping family; and to all his household, who deplore his absence; restore him also to our townsmen, who love and honour him, and bear no hostility towards the President. His recall will be an admirable

political act, and will give our country more happiness that the highest act of benevolence.'"

This conversation between Jasmin and Texier immediately appeared in the columns of the *Siècle,* accompanied with a stirring sympathetic article by the editor. It may be mentioned that M. Baze was one of Jasmin's best friends. He had introduced the poet to the public, and written the charming preface to the first volume of the 'Papillôtos,' issued in 1835. M. Baze was an advocate of the Royal Court of Agen—a man of fine character, and a true patriot. He was Mayor of Agen, commander of the National Guard, and afterwards member of the Legislative Assembly and the Senate. But he was opposed to Prince Louis Napoleon, and was one of the authors of the motion entitled *de Questeurs.* He was arrested on the night of the 2nd December, 1851, imprisoned for a month in the Mazas, and then expelled from the territory of France. During his exile he practised at Liege as an advocate.

Jasmin again went to Paris in May 1853, and this time on his mission of mercy. The editor of the *Siècle* announced his arrival. He was again fêted, and the salons rejoiced in his recitations. After a few days he was invited to Saint-Cloud. Louis Napoleon was now Emperor of France, and the Empress Eugénie sat by his side. The appearance of Jasmin was welcomed, and he was soon made thoroughly at ease by the Emperor's interesting conversation. A company had been assembled, and Jasmin was requested to recite

some of his poems. As usual, he evoked smiles and tears by turns. When the audience were in one of their fits of weeping, and Jasmin had finished his declamation, the Emperor exclaimed, "Why, poet, this is a genuine display of handkerchiefs"—(*Mais, poète, c'est un véritable scène de mouchoirs*).

Jasmin seized this moment for revealing to the Emperor the desire which he had long entertained, for recalling from exile his dear friend M. Baze. He had prepared a charming piece of verse addressed to the Empress Eugenie, requesting his return to France through the grand door of honour. "Restore him to us," he said; "Agen cries aloud. The young Empress, as good as beautiful, beloved of Heaven, will pray with her sympathetic soul, and save two children and an unhappy mother—she, who will be soon blessed as a happy mother herself." * Jasmin concluded his poem with the following words in Gascon: *Esperi! Lou angèls nou se troumpon jamày!*

The result of this appeal to the Empress was that Jasmin's prayer was immediately granted by the Emperor. M. Baze returned to France at once, without any conditions whatever. The parents of the quondam exile wrote to Jasmin thanking him most cordially for his exertions in their favour. Four days after the soirée

* The editor of Vol. IV. of Jasmin's Poems (1863) gives this note: "In this circumstance, Jasmin has realised the foresight which the ancients afforded to their poets, of predicting, two years in advance, the birth of the Prince Imperial."

at Saint-Cloud, the Prefect of the Indre-et-Loire, head of the Baze family, wrote to Jasmin, saying: "Your muse is accustomed to triumphs, but this one ought to rejoice your heart, and should yield you more honour than all the others. For my part, I feel myself under the necessity of thanking you cordially for your beautiful and noble action; and in saying so, I interpret the sentiments of the whole family." Madame Baze addressed the Emperor in a letter of grateful thanks, which she wrote at the dictation of Jasmin. The *Siècle* also gave an account of Jasmin's interview with the Emperor and Empress at Saint-Cloud, and the whole proceeding redounded to the honour of the Gascon poet.

Jasmin had been made Chevalier of the Legion of Honour at the same time as Balzac, Frederick Soulie, and Alfred de Musset. The minister bore witness to the worth of Jasmin, notwithstanding the rusticity of his idiom; and he was classed amongst the men who did honour to French literature. He was considered great, not only in his poems, but in his benevolent works: "You build churches; you help indigence; you possess the talent of a powerful benefactor; and your muse is the sister of charity."

When the news of the honours conferred upon Jasmin reached Agen, the people were most sympathetic in their demonstrations. The shop of the barber-poet was crowded with visitors, and when he himself reached the town he was received with the greatest enthusiasm. The Philharmonic Society again treated him to a

serenade, and the whole town was full of joy at the honour done to their beloved poet.

To return to the church of Vergt, which was not yet entirely finished. A bell-tower had been erected, but what was a bell-tower without bells? There was a little tinkling affair which could scarcely be heard in the church, still less in the neighbourhood. With his constant trust in Providence, the Abbé did not hesitate to buy a clock and order two large bells. The expense of both amounted to 7000 francs. How was this to be paid? His funds were entirely exhausted. The priest first applied to the inhabitants of Vergt, but they could not raise half the necessary funds. There was Jasmin! He was the only person that could enable the Abbé to defray his debt.

Accordingly, another appeal was made to the public outside of Vergt. The poet and the priest set out on their fifth and last pilgrimage; and this time they went as far as Lyons—a city which Jasmin had never seen before. There he found himself face to face with an immense audience, who knew next to nothing of his Gascon patois. He was afraid of his success; but unwilling to retreat, he resolved, he said, "to create a squadron in reserve"; that is, after reciting some of the old inspirations of his youth, to give them his *Hélène* or 'Love and Poetry,' in modern classical French. The result, we need scarcely say, was eminently successful, and the Abbé was doubly grateful in having added so many more thousand francs to his purse.

During this journey another priest, the Abbé Cabanel, united his forces with those of Jasmin and Masson. This Abbé was curate of Port de Sainte-Foi-la-Grande. He had endeavoured to erect in his parish a public school under the charge of religious teachers. He now proposed to partake of the profits of the recitations for the purpose of helping on his project; and Jasmin and Masson willingly complied with his request. They accordingly appeared at the town of Sainte-Foi, and the result was another excellent collection.

After visiting other towns, sufficient subscriptions were collected to enable the Abbé to pay off his debts. The clock and bells were christened by Monseigneur de Sangalerie, who had himself been a curate of the parish of Vergt; and the bells were inscribed with the name of JASMIN, the chief founder and rebuilder of the church. The bells were the last addition to Jasmin's bell-tower, but the final result was reached long after the beginning of the rebuilding of the church.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### JASMIN ENROLLED MAÎTRE-ÈS-JEUX AT TOULOUSE—CROWNED BY AGEN.

SHORTLY after the return of Jasmin from Paris, where he had the honour of an interview with the Emperor and Empress, as well as with the members of the French Academy, he was invited to Toulouse for the purpose of being enrolled as Maître-ès-jeux in the Academy of Jeux Floreaux.

Toulouse is known as the city of Literary Fêtes, and the reception of Jasmin as Maître-ès-Jeux will long exist as a permanent record in her annals. The Academy of Jeux Floreaux had no prize of 5000 frs. to bestow, nor any crowns, nor any golden laurels. She hides her poverty under her flowers, and although she would willingly have given all her flowers to Jasmin, yet her rules prevented her. She called Jasmin to her bosom, and gave him the heartiest of welcomes. But the honour was there—the honour of being invited to join a brotherhood of illustrious men.

The title of Maître-ès-jeux is a rare distinction, awarded only to the highest celebrities. The ceremony

of installing Jasmin took place on the 6th of February, 1854. The great *Salle des Illustres* was crowded long before he made his appearance, while the *Place du Capitol* was filled with a vast number of his admirers. The archbishop, the prefect, the mayor, the magistrates, and the principal citizens of Toulouse. were present, with the most beautiful women in the city. Many of the southern bishops were present, having desired to enjoy the pleasure of assisting at the ceremony.

After an address of congratulation, Jasmin was enrolled amongst the members, and presented with his diploma of Maître-ès-jeux. Though it was only a piece of parchment, he considered it the rarest of distinctions. It connected the poet, through five centuries, with the last of the Troubadours, whose language he had so splendidly revived. Jasmin valued his bit of parchment more highly than all the other gifts he had received. In answer to his enrolment, he said:

"I have now enough! I want no more! All things smile upon me. My muse went proudly from the forty of Toulouse to the forty of Paris. She is more than proud to-day, she is completely happy; for she sees my name, which Isaure blessed, come from the forty of Paris to the forty of Toulouse."

After his enrolment, the poet-barber left the salon. A large crowd had assembled in the court, under the peristyle, in the Place of the Capitol. Every head was uncovered as he passed through their ranks, and those who accompanied him to his lodging, called out, "Vive

Jasmin! Vive Jasmin!" Never had such a scéne been witnessed before.

Although Jasmin had declared to the Academy of Jeux Floreaux that he wanted nothing more than the diploma they had given him, yet another triumph was waiting him. The citizens of Agen capped all the previous honours of the poet. They awarded him a crown of gold, which must have been the greatest recompense of all. They had known him during almost his entire life—the son of a humpbacked tailor and a crippled mother, of poor but honest people, whose means had been helped by the grandfather, Boé, who begged from door to door, the old man who closed his eyes in the hospital, "where all the Jasmins die!"

They had known him by his boyish tricks, his expulsion from the Academy, his setting up as a barber, his happy marriage, and his laborious progress, until the "shower of silver" came running into his shop. "Pau de labouro, pau de salouro," No work, no bread. Though born in the lowest condition of life, he had, by the help of his wife, and by his own energy and perseverance, raised himself to the highest position as a man of character. Before he reached the age of thirty * he began to show evidences of his genius as a poet.

* There is a Gascon proverb which says:

"Qu'â vingt ans nouns po,
Qu'â trent ans noun sa,
Qu'â cranto noun er,

But still more important were his works of charity, which endeared him to the people through the South of France. It was right and reasonable that his fellow-citizens should desire to take part in the honours conferred upon their beloved poet. He had already experienced their profound sympathy during his self-sacrificing work, but they now wished to testify their public admiration, and to proclaim the fact by some offering of intrinsic value.

The Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul—whom he had so often helped in their charitable labours—first started the idea. They knew what Jasmin had done to found schools, orphanages, and crèches. Indeed, this was their own mission, and no one had laboured so willingly as he had done to help them in their noble work. The idea, thus started by the society, immediately attracted public attention, and was received with universal approval.

A committee was formed, consisting of De Bouy, mayor; H. Noubel, deputy; Aunac, banker; Canon Deyche, arch-priest of the cathedral; Dufort, imperial councillor; Guizot, receiver-general; Labat, advocate-general; Maysonnade, president of the conference of Saint-Vincent de Paul; Couturier, the engineer, and

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Qu'â cincanto se paouso pa,
Sabe pa que pot esper."

"Who at twenty does nothing; who at thirty knows nothing; who at forty has nothing; who at fifty changes nothing: for him there is no hope."

other gentlemen. A subscription was at once opened and more than four thousand persons answered the appeal.

When the subscriptions were collected, they were found so great in amount, that the committee resolved to present Jasmin with a crown of gold. Five hundred years before, Petrarch had been crowned at Rome in the name of Italy, and now Jasmin was to be crowned at Agen, in the name of Meridional France. To crown a man, who, during his lifetime had been engaged in the trade of barber and hair-dresser, seemed something extraordinary and unique. To the cold-blooded people of the North there might appear something theatrical in such a demonstration, but it was quite in keeping with the warm-hearted children of the South.

The construction of the crown was entrusted to MM. Fannières of Paris, the best workers of gold in France. They put their best art and skill into the crown. It consisted of two branches of laurel in dead gold, large and knotted behind, like the crowns of the Cæsars and the poets, with a ruby, artistically arranged, containing the simple device: *La Ville d'Agen, à Jasmin!* The pendants of the laurel, in dead silver, were mixed with the foliage. The style of the work was severe and pure, and the effect of the chef d'œuvre was admirable.

The public meeting, at which the golden crown was presented to Jasmin, was held on the 27th of November, 1856, in the large hall of the Great Seminary. Gilt

banners were hung round the walls, containing the titles of Jasmin's principal poems, while the platform was splendidly decorated with emblems and festoons of flowers. Although the great hall was of large dimensions, it could not contain half the number of people who desired to be present on this grand occasion.

An immense crowd assembled in the streets adjoining the seminary. Jasmin, on his arrival, was received with a triple salvo of applause from the crowd without, and next from the assembly within. On the platform were the members of the subscription committee, the prefect, the Bishop of Agen, the chiefs of the local government, the general in command of the district, and a large number of officers and ecclesiastics.

Jasmin, when taking his place on the platform saluted the audience with one of his brilliant impromptus, and proceeded to recite some of his favourite poems: *Charity; The Doctor of the Poor; Town and Country;* and, *The Week's Work of a Son.* Then M. Noubel, in his double capacity of deputy for the department, and member of the subscription committee, addressed Jasmin in the following words:

"Poet, I appear here in the name of the people of Agen, to offer you the testimony of their admiration and profound sympathy. I ask you to accept this crown! It is given you by a loving and hearty friend, in the name of your native town of Agen, which your poetry has charmed, which rejoices in your present success, and is proud of the glory of your genius. Agen

welcomed the first germs of your talent; she has seen it growing, and increasing your fame; she has entered with you into the palaces of kings; she has associated herself with your triumphs throughout; now the hour of recognising your merits has arrived, and she honours herself in crowning you.

"But it is not merely the poet whom we recognise to-day; you have a much greater claim to our homage. In an age in which egoism and the eager thirst for riches prevails, you have, in the noble work which you have performed, displayed the virtues of benevolence and self-sacrifice. You yourself have put them into practice. Ardent in the work of charity, you have gone wherever misery and poverty had to be relieved, and all that you yourself have received was merely the blessings of the unfortunate. Each of your days has been celebrated for its good works, and your whole life has been a hymn to benevolence and charity.

"Accept, then, Jasmin, this crown! Great poet, good citizen, you have nobly earned it! Give it an honoured place in that glorious museum of yours, which the towns and cities of the South have enriched by their gifts. May it remain there in testimony of your poetical triumphs, and attest the welcome recognition of your merits by your fellow-citizens.

"For myself, I cannot but be proud of the mission which has been entrusted to me. I only owe it, I know, to the position of deputy in which you have placed me by popular election. I am proud, nevertheless, of

having the honour of crowning you, and I shall ever regard this event as the most glorious recollection of my life."

After this address, during which M. Noubel was greatly moved, he took the crown of gold and placed it on the head of the poet. It is impossible to describe the enthusiasm of the meeting at this supreme moment. The people were almost beside themselves. Their exclamations of sympathy and applause were almost frantic. Jasmin wept with happiness. After the emotion had subsided, with his eyes full of tears, he recited his piece of poetry entitled: *The Crown of my Birthplace.**

In this poem, Jasmin took occasion to recite the state of poverty in which he was born, yet with the star of poetry in his breast; his dear mother, and her anxieties about his education and up-bringing; his growth; his first efforts in poetical composition, and his final triumph; and at last his crown of gold conferred upon him by the people of Agen—the crown of his birthplace.

> "I feel that if my birthplace crowns me,
> In place of singing . . . I should weep!"

After Jasmin had recited his touching poem, he affectionately took leave of his friends, and the assembly dispersed.

* Perhaps this might be better rendered "The Crown of my Infancy;" in Gascon, "La Courouno del Brés."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### LAST POEMS—MORE MISSIONS OF CHARITY.

THIS was the last occasion on which Jasmin publicly appeared before his fellow-townsmen; and it could not perhaps have been more fitting and appropriate. He still went on composing poetry; amongst other pieces, *La Vierge*, dedicated to the Bishop of Algiers, who acknowledged it in a complimentary letter. In his sixty-second year, when his hair had become white, he composed some New Recollections (*Mous Noubèls Soubenis*), in which he again recalled the memories of his youth. In his new *Souvenirs* he only gives a few fresh stories relating to the period of his infancy and youth. Indeed they scarcely go beyond the period covered by his original *Souvenirs*.

In the midst of his various honours at Paris, Toulouse, and Agen, he did not forget his true mission, the help and relief of the afflicted. He went to Albi, and gave a recitation which produced 2000 francs. The whole of this sum went to the poor. There was nothing for himself but applause, and showers of flowers thrown at his feet by the ladies present.

It was considered quite unprecedented that so large

a sum should have been collected in so poor a district. The mayor however was prepared for the event. After a touching address to the poet, he presented him with a ring of honour, with the arms of the town, and the inscribed words: "*Albi à Jasmin.*"

He went for the same purpose, to Castéra in the Gers, a decayed town, to recite his poems, in the words of the curé, for "our poor church." He was received as usual with great enthusiasm; and a present of silver was given to him with the inscribed words: *A Jasmin, l'Eglise du Castéra reconnaissante!*" Jasmin answered, by reciting an impromptu he had composed for the occasion.

At Bordeaux, one of his favourite cities, he was received with more than the usual enthusiasm. There he made a collection in aid of the Conference of Saint-Vincent de Paul. In the midst of the séance, he appeared almost inspired, and recited "*La Charité dans Bordeaux*" — the grand piece of the evening. The assembly rose *en masse*, and cheered the poet with frantic applause. The ladies threw an avalanche of bouquets at the hero of the fête.

After quiet had been restored, the Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul cordially thanked Jasmin through the mouth of their President; and presented him with a magnificent golden circlet, with this inscription: "*La Caritat dins Bourdeau!*"

Among his other recitations towards the close of his life, for the purpose of collecting money for the relief

of the poor, were those at Montignac in Périgord; at Saint-Macaire; at Saint-André de Cubzac, and at Monsegur. Most of these were remote villages, far apart from each other. He had disappointed his friends at Arcachon several years before, when he failed to make his appearance with the Abbé Masson, during their tour on behalf of the church of Vergt, owing to the unpunctuality of the steamboat; but he promised to visit them at some future period.

He now redeemed his promise. The poor were in need, and he went to their help. A large audience had assembled to listen to his recitations, and a considerable sum of money was collected. The audience overwhelmed him with praises, and the Mayor of Teste —the head department of the district—after thanking Jasmin for his admirable assistance, presented him with a gold medal, on which was inscribed: "*Fête de Charité d'Arcachon: A Jasmin.*" These laurels and medals had become so numerous, that Jasmin had almost become tired of such tributes to his benevolence.

He went to Barèges again, where Monseigneur the Bishop of Tarbes had appealed to him for help in the erection of an hospital. From that town he proceeded to Saint-Emilion and Castel-Naudary, to aid the Society of Mutual Help in these two towns. In fact, he was never weary of well-doing. "This calamitous winter," he wrote in January, 1854, "requires all my devotion. I will obey my conscience and give myself to the help

of the famished and suffering, even to the extinction of my personal health."

And so it was to the end. When his friends offered him public entertainments, he would say, "No, no! give the money to the poor!" What gave Jasmin as much pleasure as any of the laurels and crowns conferred upon him, was a beautifully bound copy of the 'Imitation of Christ,' with the following inscription: "A testimony from the Bishop of Saint-Flour, in acknowledgment of the services which the great poet has rendered to the poor of his diocese."

No poet had so many opportunities of making money, and of enriching himself by the contributions of the rich as well as the poor. But such an idea never entered his mind. He would have regarded it as a sacrilege to evoke the enthusiasm of the people, and make money for his own benefit, or to speculate upon the triumphs of his muse. Gold earned in this way, he said, would have burnt his fingers. He worked solely for the benefit of those who could not help themselves. His poetry was to him like a sweet rose that delighted the soul and produced the fruits of charity.

His conduct has been called Quixotic. Would that there were more Quixotes in the world! After his readings, which sometimes produced from two to three thousand francs, the whole of the proceeds were handed over to those for whose benefit they had been given, after deducting, of course, the expenses of travelling, of which he kept a most accurate account.

It is estimated that the amount of money collected by Jasmin during his recitations for philanthropic objects amounted to at least 1,500,000 francs (equal to £62,500). Besides, there were the labour of his journeys, and the amount of his correspondence, which were almost heroic. M. Rabain * states that from 1825 to 1860, the number of letters received by Jasmin was more than twelve thousand.

Mr. Dickens, in giving the readings from his works in Great Britain, netted over £35,000, besides what he received for his readings in America. This, of course, led quite reasonably to the enhancing of his fortune. But all that Jasmin received from his readings was given away—some say "thrown away"—to the poor and the needy. It is not necessary to comment on such facts; one can only mention and admire them.

The editor of *Le Pays* says: "The journeys of Jasmin in the South were like a triumphal march. No prince ever received more brilliant ovations. Flowers were strewn in his way; the bells rang out on his appearance; the houses were illuminated; the Mayors addressed him in words of praise; the magistrates, the clergy followed him in procession. Bestowed upon a man, and a poet, such honours might seem exaggerated; but Jasmin, under the circumstances, represented more than poetry: he represented *Charity*. Each of his

* 'Jasmin, sa Vie et ses Œuvres.' Paris, 1867.

verses transformed him into an alms-giver; and from the harvest of gold which he reaped from the people, he preserved for himself only the flowers. His epics were for the unfortunate. This was very noble; and the people of Agen should be proud of their poet."*

The account which Jasmin records of his expenses during a journey of fifty days, in which he collected more than 20,000 francs, is very remarkable. It is given in the fourth volume of 'Les Papillôtes,' published in 1863, the year before his death, and is entitled, "Note of my expenses of the journey, which I have deducted from the receipts during my circuit of fifty days."

On certain occasions nothing whatever was charged, but a carriage was probably placed at his disposal, or the ticket for a railway or a diligence may have been paid for by his friends. On many occasions he walked the distance between the several places, and thus saved the cost of his conveyance. But every item of expense was set forth in his "Note" with the most scrupulous exactness.

Here is the translation of Jasmin's record for his journeys during these fifty days:—". . . At Foix, from M. de Groussou, President of the Communion of Bienfaisance, 33 fr., 50 c. At Pamiers, *nil.* At Saint-Girons, from the President of the Society of St.-Vincent de Paul, 16 fr. At Lavaur, from M. the Mayor, 22 fr. At Saint-Sulpice, *nil.* At Toulouse,

* *Le Pays*, 14th February, 1854.

where I gave five special *séances*, of which the two first, to Saint-Vincent de Paul and the Prefecture, produced more than 1600 fr., *nil*. My muse was sufficiently accounted for; it was during my reception as Maître-ès-jeux. At Rodez, from the President of the Conference of Saint-Vincent de Paul, 29 fr. 50 c. At Saint-Geniez, *nil*. At Saint-Flour, from M. Simon, vicar-general, 22 fr. 50 c. At Murat, *nil*. At Mauriac, *nil*. At Aurillac, from M. Geneste, mayor, for my return to Agen, 24 fr. Total, 147 fr. 50 centimes."

Thus, more than 20,000 francs were collected for the poor, Jasmin having deducted 147 fr. 50 c. for the cost of his journeys from place to place. It must also be remembered that he travelled mostly in winter, when the ground was covered with snow. In February, 1854, M. Migneret, Prefect of Haute-Garonne, addressed a letter to Jasmin, which is worthy of preservation. "It is pleasant," he said, "after having enjoyed at night the charms of your poetry, to begin the next day by taking account of the misfortunes they relieve. I owe you this double honour, and I thank you with the greatest gratitude. . . . As to our admiration of your talent, it yields to our esteem for your noble heart; the poet cannot be jealous of the good citizen." *

Notwithstanding the rigour of the season, and the snow and wind, the like of which had not been known for more than twenty years, Jasmin was welcomed by

* 'Las Papillôtos de Jasmin,' iv. 56.

an immense audience at Rodez. The recitation was given in the large hall of the Palais de Justice, and never had so large a collection been made. The young people of the town wished to give Jasmin a banquet, but he declined, as he had to hurry on to another place for a similar purpose. He left them, however, one of his poems, prepared for the occasion.

He arrived at Saint-Flour exhausted by fatigue. His voice began to fail, partly through the rigours of the climate, yet he continued to persevere. The bishop entertained him in his palace, and introduced him personally to the audience before which he was to give his recitations. Over the entrance-door was written the inscription, "A Jasmin, le Poète des Pauvres, Saint-Flour reconnaissante!" Before Jasmin began to recite he was serenaded by the audience. The collection was greater than had ever been known. It was here that the bishop presented Jasmin with that famous manual, 'The Imitation of Christ,' already referred to.

It was the same at Murat, Mauriac, and Aurillac. The recitation at Aurillac was given in the theatre, and the receipts were 1200 francs. Here also he was serenaded. He departed from Aurillac covered with the poor people's blessings and gratitude.

At Toulouse he gave another entertainment, at the instance of the Conference of Saint-François Xavier. There were about 3000 persons present, mostly of the working classes. The séance was prolonged almost to midnight. The audience, most of whom had to rise

early in the morning, forgot their sleep and wished the poet to prolong his recitations!

Although the poor machine of Jasmin's body was often in need of rest, he still went about doing good. He never ceased ministering to the poor until he was altogether unable to go to their help. Even in the distressing cold, rain, and wind of winter—and it was in winter more than in summer that he travelled, for it was then that the poor were most distressed—he entirely disregarded his own comfort, and sometimes travelled at much peril; yet he went north and south, by highways and byways, by rivers and railways, in any and every direction, provided his services could be of use.

He sacrificed himself always, and was perfectly regardless of self. He was overwhelmed with honours and praises. He became weary of triumphs—of laurels, flowers, and medals—he sometimes became weary of his life; yet he never could refuse any pressing solicitation made to him for a new recital of his poems.

His trials, especially in winter time, were often most distressing. He would recite before a crowded audience, in a heated room, and afterwards face the icy air without, often without any covering for his throat and neck. Hence his repeated bronchial attacks, the loss of his voice, and other serious affections of his lungs.

The last meeting which Jasmin attended on behalf of the poor was at the end of January 1864, only three months before his death. It was at Villeneuve-sur-

Lot, a town several miles north of Agen. He did not desire to put the people to the expense of a conveyance, and therefore he decided to walk. He was already prematurely old and stooping.

The disease which ended his life had already made considerable progress. He should have been in bed; nevertheless, as the poor needed his help, the brave old man determined to proceed to Villeneuve. He was helped along the road by some of his friends; and at last, wearied and panting, he arrived at his destination. The meeting was held in the theatre, which was crowded to suffocation.

No sooner had Jasmin reached the platform, amidst the usual triumphant cheering, than, after taking a short rest, he sprang to his feet and began the recitation of his poems. Never had his voice seemed more spirited and entrancing. He delighted his audience, while he pleaded most eloquently for the relief of the poor.

"I see him now," wrote one of his friends, "from behind the side-scenes of the theatre, perspiring profusely, wet to the skin, with a carafe of water to allay the ardent thirst occasioned by three hours of splendid declamation."

In his then critical state, the three hours' declamation was enough to kill him. At all events, it was his last recitation. It was the song of the dying swan. In the midst of his triumphs, he laid down his life for the poor; like the soldier who dies with the sound of victory in his ears.

## CHAPTER XX.

### DEATH OF JASMIN—HIS CHARACTER.

AFTER his final recitation at Villeneuve, Jasmin, sick, ill, and utterly exhausted, reached Agen with difficulty. He could scarcely stand. It was not often that travelling had so affected him; but nature now cried out and rebelled. His wife was, of course, greatly alarmed. He was at once carefully put to bed, and there he lay for fifteen days.

When he was at length able to rise, he was placed in his easy chair, but he was still weak, wearied, and exhausted. Mariette believed that he would yet recover his strength; but the disease under which he laboured had taken a strong hold of him, and Jasmin felt that he was gradually approaching the close of his life.

About this time Renan's 'Life of Jesus' was published. Jasmin was inexpressibly shocked by the appearance of the book, for it seemed to him to strike at the foundations of Christianity, and to be entirely opposed to the teachings of the Church. He immediately began to compose a poem, entitled *The Poet of the People to M. Renan,** in which he vindicated the

* 'Lou Poeto del Puple a Moussu Renan.'

Catholic faith, and denounced the poisonous mischief contained in the new attack upon Christianity. The poem was full of poetic feeling, with many pathetic touches illustrative of the life and trials of man while here below.

The composition of this poem occupied him for some time. Although broken by grief and pain, he made every haste to correct the proofs, feeling that it would probably be the last work that he should give to the world. And it *was* his last. It was finished and printed on the 24th of August, 1864. He sent several copies to his more intimate friends with a dedication; and then he took finally to his bed, never to rise again. "I am happy," he said, "to have terminated my career by an act of faith, and to have consecrated my last work to the name of Jesus Christ." He felt that it was his passport to eternity.

Jasmin's life was fast drawing to a close. He knew that he must soon die; yet never a word of fear escaped his lips; nor was his serenity of mind disturbed. He made his preparations for departure with as much tranquillity and happiness, as on the days when he was about to start on one of his philanthropic missions.

He desired that M. Saint-Hilaire, the vicar of the parish, should be sent for. The priest was at once by the bedside of his dying friend. Jasmin made his replies to him in a clear and calm voice. His wife, his son, his grand-children, were present when he received the Viaticum—the last sacrament of the church. After-

the ceremony he turned to his wife and family, and said, "In my last communion I have prayed to God that He may keep you all in the most affectionate peace and union, and that He may ever reign in the hearts of those whom I love so much and am about to leave behind me." Then speaking to his wife, he said, "Now Mariette,—now I can die peacefully."

He continued to live until the following morning. He conversed occasionally with his wife, his son, and a few attached friends. He talked, though with difficulty, of the future of the family, for whom he had made provision. At last, lifting himself up by the aid of his son, he looked towards his wife. The brightness of love glowed in his eyes; but in a moment he fell back senseless upon the pillow, and his spirit quietly passed away.

Jasmin departed this life on the 5th of October, 1864, at the age of sixty-five. He was not an old man; but the brightest jewels soonest wear their setting. When laid in his coffin, the poem to Renan, his last act of faith, was placed on his breast, with his hands crossed over it.

The grief felt at his death was wide and universal. In the South of France he was lamented as a personal friend; and he was followed to the grave by an immense number of his townspeople.

The municipal administration took charge of the funeral. At ten o'clock in the morning of the 8th October the procession started from Jasmin's house on

the Promenade du Gravier. On the coffin were placed the Crown of Gold presented to him by his fellow-townsmen, the cross of Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, and that of Saint-Gregory the Great. A company of five men, and a detachment of troops commanded by an officer, formed the line.

The following gentlemen held the cords of the funeral pall :—M. Féart, Prefect of the Lot-et-Garonne; M. Henri Noubel, Deputy and Mayor of Agen; General Ressayre, Commander of the Military Division; M. Bouet, President of the Imperial Court; M. de Laffore, engineer; and M. Magen, Secretary of the Society of Agriculture, Sciences, and Arts. A second funeral pall was held by six coiffeurs of the corporation to which Jasmin had belonged. Behind the hearse were the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine, the Sisters of Saint-Vincent de Paul, and the Little Sisters of the Poor.

The mourners were headed by the poet's son and the other members of his family. The cortege was very numerous, including the élite of the population. Among them were the Procureur-General, the Procureur-Imperial, the Engineer-in-chief of the Department, the Director of Taxes, many Councillors-General, all the members of the Society of Agriculture, many officers of the army, many ecclesiastics as well as ministers of the reformed worship. Indeed, representatives of nearly the whole population were present.

The procession first entered the church of Saint-

Hilaire, where the clergy of the four parishes had assembled. High mass was performed by the full choir. The *Miserere* of Beethoven was given, and some exquisite pieces from Mozart. Deep emotion was produced by the introduction, in the midst of this beautiful music, of some popular airs from the romance of *Franconnette* and *Me Cal Mouri*, Jasmin's first work. The entire ceremony was touching, and moved many to tears.

After the service had been finished, the procession moved off to the cemetery—passing through the principal streets of the town, which were lined by crowds of mournful spectators. Large numbers of people had also assembled at the cemetery. After the final prayer, M. Noubel, Deputy and Mayor of Agen, took the opportunity of pronouncing a eulogium over the grave of the deceased. His speech was most sympathetic and touching. We can only give a few extracts from his address:

"Dear and great poet," he said, "at the moment when we commit to the earth thy mortal remains, I wish, in the name of this town of Agen, where thou wert born and which thou hast truly loved, to address to thee a last, a supreme adieu. Alas! What would'st thou have said to me some years ago, when I placed upon thy forehead the crown—decreed by the love and admiration of thy compatriots—that I should so soon have been called upon to fulfil a duty that now rends my heart. The bright genius of thy countenance, the brilliant

vigour in thine eyes, which time, it seemed, would never tarnish, indicated the fertile source of thy beautiful verses and noble aspirations!

"And yet thy days had been numbered, and you yourself seemed to have cherished this presentiment; but, faithful to thy double mission of poet and apostle of benevolence, thou redoubled thy efforts to enrich with new epics thy sheaf of poetry, and by thy bountiful gifts and charity to allay the sorrows of the poor. Indefatigable worker! Thou hast dispensed most unselfishly thy genius and thy powers! Death alone has been able to compel thee to repose!

"But; now our friend is departed for ever! That poetical fire, that brilliant and vivid intelligence, that ardent heart, have now ceased to strive for the good of all; for this great and generous soul has ascended to Him who gave it birth. It has returned to the Giver of Good, accompanied by our sorrows and our tears. It has ascended to heaven with the benedictions of all the distressed and unfortunate whom he has succoured. It is our hope and consolation that he may find the recompense assured for those who have usefully and boldly fulfilled their duty here below.

"This duty, O poet, thou hast well fulfilled. Those faculties, which God had so largely bestowed upon thee, have never been employed save for the service of just and holy causes. Child of the people, thou hast shown us how mind and heart enlarge with work; that the sufferings and privations of thy youth enabled thee to

retain thy love of the poor and thy pity for the distressed. Thy muse, sincerely Christian, was never used to inflame the passions, but always to instruct, to soothe, and to console. Thy last song, the *Song of the Swan*, was an eloquent and impassioned protest of the Christian, attacked in his fervent belief and his faith.

"God has doubtless marked the term of thy mission; and thy death was not a matter of surprise. Thou hast come and gone, without fear; and religion, thy supreme consoler, has calmed the sufferings of thy later hours, as it had cradled thee in thy earlier years.

"Thy body will disappear, but thy spirit, Jasmin, will never be far from us. Inspire us with thy innocent gaiety and brotherly love. The town of Agen is never ungrateful; she counts thee amongst the most pure and illustrious of her citizens. She will consecrate thy memory in the way most dignified to thee and to herself.

"The inhabitants of towns without number, where thou hast exercised thy apostolate of charity, will associate themselves with this work of affection and remembrance. But the most imperishable monument is that which thou hast thyself founded with thine own head and hands, and which will live in our hearts—the creations of thy genius and the memory of thy philanthropy."

After the Mayor of Agen had taken leave of the mortal remains of the poet, M. Capot, President of the Society of Agriculture, Sciences, and Arts, gave another

eloquent address. He was followed by M. Magen, Secretary to the same society. The troops fired a salute over the grave, and took leave of the poet's remains with military honours. The immense crowd of mourners then slowly departed from the cemetery.

Another public meeting took place on the 12th of May, 1870, on the inauguration of the bronze statue of Jasmin in the Place Saint Antoine, now called the Place Jasmin. The statue was erected by public subscription, and executed by the celebrated M. Vital Dubray. It stands nearly opposite the house where Jasmin lived and carried on his trade. Many of his old friends came from a considerable distance to be present at the inauguration of the statue. The Abbé Masson of Vergt was there, whose church Jasmin had helped to re-build. M. l'Abbé Donis, curate of Saint-Louis at Bordeaux, whom he had often helped with his recitations; the able philologist Azais; the young and illustrious Provençal poet Mistral; and many representatives of the Parisian and Southern press, were present on the occasion. The widow and son of the poet, surrounded by their family, were on the platform. When the statue was unveiled, a salvo of artillery was fired; then the choir of the Brothers of the Communal Christian School saluted the "glorious resurrection of Jasmin" with their magnificent music, which was followed by enthusiastic cheers.

M. Henri Noubel, Deputy and Mayor of Agen, made an eloquent speech on the unveiling of the statue. He

had already pronounced his eulogium of Jasmin at the burial of the poet, but he was still full of the subject, and brought to mind many charming recollections of the sweetness of disposition and energetic labours of Jasmin on behalf of the poor and afflicted. He again expressed his heartfelt regret for the departure of the poet.

M. Noubel was followed by M. l'Abbé Donis, of Bordeaux, who achieved a great success by his eulogy of the life of Jasmin, whom he entitled "The Saint-Vincent de Paul of poetry."

He was followed by the Abbé Capot, in the name of the clergy, and by M. Magen, in the name of the Society of Agriculture, Sciences, and Arts. They were followed by MM. Azais and Pozzi, who recited some choice pieces of poetry in the Gascon patois. M. Mistral came last—the celebrated singer of "Mirèio"—who, with his faltering voice, recited a beautiful piece of poetry composed for the occasion, which was enthusiastically applauded.

The day was wound up with a banquet in honour of M. Dubray, the artist who had executed the bronze statue. The Place Jasmin was brilliantly illuminated during the evening, where an immense crowd assembled to view the statue of the poet, whose face and attitude appeared in splendid relief amidst a blaze of light.

It is unnecessary further to describe the character of Jasmin. It is sufficiently shown by his life and labours

—his genius and philanthropy. In the recollections of his infancy and boyhood, he truthfully describes the pleasures and sorrows of his youth—his love for his mother, his affection for his grandfather, who died in the hospital, "where all the Jasmins die." He did not even conceal the little tricks played by him in the Academy, from which he was expelled, nor the various troubles of his apprenticeship.

This was one of the virtues of Jasmin—his love of truth. He never pretended to be other than what he was. He was even proud of being a barber, with his "hand of velvet." He was pleased to be entertained by the coiffeurs of Agen, Paris, Bordeaux, and Toulouse. He was a man of the people, and believed in the dignity of labour. At the same time, but for his perseverance and force of character, he never could have raised himself to the honour and power of the true poet.

He was born poor, and the feeling of inherited poverty adhered to him through life, and inspired him with profound love for the poor and the afflicted of his class. He was always ready to help them, whether they lived near to him or far from him. He was, in truth, "The Saint-Vincent de Paul of poetry." His statue, said M. Noubel, pointing up to it, represented the glorification of genius and virtue, the conquest of ignorance and misery.

M. Deydou said at Bordeaux, when delivering an address upon the genius of Jasmin—his Eminence Cardinal Donnet presiding—that poetry, when devoted

to the cause of charity, according to the poet himself, was "the glory of the earth and the perfume of heaven."

Jasmin loved his dear town of Agen, and was proud of it. After his visit to the metropolis, he said, "If Paris makes me proud, Agen makes me happy." "This town," he said, on another occasion, "has been my birth-place; soon it shall be my grave." He loved his country too, and above all he loved his native language. It was his mother-tongue; and though he was often expostulated with for using it, he never forsook the Gascon. It was the language of the home, of the fire-side, of the fields, of the workshop, of the people amongst whom he lived, and he resolved ever to cherish and elevate the Gascon dialect.

"Popular and purely natural poetry," said Montaigne in the 16th century, "has a simplicity and gracefulness which surpass the beauty of poetry according to art." Jasmin united the naïve artlessness of poetry with the perfection of art. He retained the simplicity of youth throughout his career, and his domestic life was the sanctuary of all the virtues.

In his poems he vividly described filial love, conjugal tenderness, and paternal affection, because no one felt these graces of life more fervently than himself. He was like the Italian painter, who never went beyond his home for a beautiful model.

Victor Hugo says that a great man is like the sun—most beautiful when he touches the earth, at his rising

and at his setting. Jasmin's rising was in the depths of honest poverty, but his setting was glorious. God crowned his fine life by a special act of favour; for the last song of the poet was his "act of faith"—his address to Renan.

Jasmin was loyal, single-minded, self-reliant, patient, temperate, and utterly unselfish. He made all manner of sacrifices during his efforts in the cause of charity. Nothing was allowed to stand in the way of his missions on behalf of the poor. In his journey of fifty days in 1854, he went from Orthez—the country of Gaston Phœbus—to the mountains of Auvergne, in spite of the rigours of the weather. During that journey he collected 20,000 francs. In all, as we have said, he collected, during his life-time, more than a million and a half of francs, all of which he devoted to the cause of philanthropy.

Two words were engraved on the pedestal of his statue, *Poetry and Charity!* Charity was the object and purpose of his heroic programme. Yet, in his poetry he always exhibited his tender-hearted gaiety. Even when he weeps, you see the ray of sunlight in his tears. Though simple as a child in ordinary life, he displayed in his writings the pathos and satire of the ancient Troubadours, with no small part of the shrewdness and wit attributed to persons of his calling.

Although esteemed and praised by all ranks and classes of people—by king, emperor, princes, and princesses; by cardinals and bishops; by generals,

magistrates, literary men, and politicians—though the working people almost worshipped him, and village girls strewed flowers along his pathway—though the artisan quitted his workshop, and the working woman her washing-tub, to listen to his marvellous recitations, yet Jasmin never lost his head or was carried away by the enthusiastic cheers which accompanied his efforts, but remained simple and unaffected to the last.

Another characteristic of him was, that he never forsook his friends, however poor. His happiest moments were those in which he encountered a companion of his early youth. Many still survived who had accompanied him while making up his bundle of fagots on the islands of the Garonne. He was delighted to shake hands with them, and to help, when necessary, these playmates of his boyhood.

He would also meet with pleasure the working women of his acquaintance,—those who had related to him the stories of Loup Garou and the traditions of the neighbourhood, and encouraged the boy from his earliest youth. Then, at a later period of his life, nothing could have been more worthy of him than his affection for his old benefactor, M. Baze, and his pleading with Napoleon III., through the Empress, for his return to France "through the great gate of honour!"

Had Jasmin a fault? Yes, he had many, for no one exists within the limits of perfection. But he had one in especial, which he himself confessed. He was vain and loved applause, nor did he conceal his love.

When at Toulouse, he said to some of his friends, "I love to be applauded: it is my whim; and I think it would be difficult for a poet to free himself from the excitement of applause." When at Paris, he said, "Applaud! applaud! The cheers you raise will be heard at Agen." Who would not overlook a fault, if fault it be, which is confessed in so naïve a manner?

When complimented about reviving the traditions of the Troubadours, Jasmin replied, "The Troubadours, indeed! Why, I am a better poet than any of the Troubadours! Not one of them could have composed a long poem of sustained interest, like my *Franconnette*."

Any fault or weakness which Jasmin exhibited was effaced by the good wishes and prayers of thousands of the poor and afflicted whom he had relieved by his charity and benevolence. The reality of his life almost touches the ideal. Indeed, it was a long apostolate.

Cardinal Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux, said of him, that "he was gifted with a rich nature, a loyal and unreserved character, and a genius as fertile as the soil of his native country. The lyre of Jasmin," he said, "had three chords, which summed up the harmonies of heaven and earth—the true, the useful, and the beautiful."

Did not the members of the French Academy—the highest literary institution in the world—strike a gold medal in his honour, with the inscription, "La médaille du poète moral et populaire"? M. Sainte-Beuve, the most distinguished of French critics, used a much

stronger expression. He said, "If France had ten poets like Jasmin—ten poets of the same power and influence —she need no longer have any fear of revolutions."

Genius is as nothing in the sight of God; but "whosoever shall give a cup of water to drink in the name of Christ, because they belong to Christ, shall not lose his reward." M. Tron, Deputy and Mayor of Bagnère-du-Luchon, enlarged upon this text in his eulogy of Jasmin.

"He was a man," he said, "as rich in his heart as in his genius. He carried out that life of 'going about doing good' which Christ rehearsed for our instruction. He fed the hungry, clothed the naked, succoured the distressed, and consoled and sympathised with the afflicted. Few men have accomplished more than he has done. His existence was unique, not only in the history of poets, but of philanthropists."

A life so full of good could only end with a Christian death. He departed with a lively faith and serene piety, crowning by a peaceful death one of the strangest and most diversified careers in the nineteenth century. "Poetry and Charity," inscribed on the pedestal of his statue in Agen, fairly sums up his noble life and character.

# APPENDIX.

## TRANSLATIONS FROM JASMIN'S POEMS.

# APPENDIX.

## JASMIN'S DEFENCE OF THE GASCON DIALECT.

*To* M. SYLVAIN DUMON, *Deputy-Minister, who has condemned to death our native language.*

There's not a deeper grief to man
Than when our mother, faint with years,
Decrepit, old, and weak, and wan,
Beyond the leech's art appears;
When by her couch her son may stay,
And press her hand, and watch her eyes,
And feel, though she survives to-day,
Perchance his hope to-morrow dies.

It is not thus, believe me, Sir,
With this enchantress, we will call
Our second mother. Frenchmen err,
Who cent'ries since proclaimed her fall!
Our mother tongue, all melody,
While music lives, shall never die.

Yes! still she lives, her words still ring,
Her children yet her carols sing;
And thousand years may roll away
Before her magic notes decay.

The people love their ancient songs, and will
While yet a people, love and keep them still.
These lays are like their mother—they recall
Fond thoughts of brother, sister, friends, and all
The many little things that please the heart—
Those dreams and hopes, from which we cannot part;
These songs are as sweet waters, where we find.
Health in the sparkling wave that nerves the mind.
In every home, at every cottage door,
By every fireside, when our toil is o'er,
These songs are round us, near our cradles sigh,
And to the grave attend us when we die.

Oh! think, cold critic! 'twill be late and long
Ere time shall sweep away this flood of song!
There are who bid this music sound no more,
And you can hear them, nor defend—deplore!
You, who were born where the first daisies grew,
Have fed upon its honey, sipp'd its dew,
Slept in its arms, and wakened to its kiss,
Danced to its sounds, and warbled to its tone—
You can forsake it in an hour like this!
Weary of age, you may renounce, disown,
And blame one minstrel who is true—alone!

For me, truth to my eyes made all things plain;
At Paris, the great fount, I did not find
The waters pure, and to my stream again
I come, with saddened and with sobered mind;
And now the spell is broken, and I rate
The little country far above the great.

For you, who seem her sorrows to deplore,
You, seated high in power, the first among
Beware! nor make her cause of grief the more;
Believe her mis'ry, nor condemn her tongue.

Methinks you injure where you seek to heal,
If you deprive her of that only weal.

We love, alas! to sing in our distress;
For so the bitterness of woe seems less;
But if we may not in our language mourn,
What will the polish'd give us in return?
Fine sentences, but all for us unmeet—
Words full of grace, even such as courtiers greet:
A deck'd out miss, too delicate and nice
To walk in fields; too tender and precise
To sing the chorus of the poor, or come
When Labour lays him down fatigued at home.

To cover rags with gilded robes were vain—
The rents of poverty would show too plain.

How would this dainty dame, with haughty brow,
Shrink at a load, and shudder at a plough!
Sulky, and piqued, and silent would she stand
As the tired peasant urged his team along:
No word of kind encouragement at hand,
For flocks no welcome, and for herds no song!

Yet we will learn, and you shall teach—
Our people shall have double speech:
One to be homely, one polite,
As you have robes for different wear;
But this is all:—'tis just and right,
And more our children will not bear,
Lest flocks of buzzards flit along,
Where nightingales once poured their song.

There may be some who, vain and proud,
May ape the manners of the crowd,
Lisp French, and maim it at each word,
And jest and gibe to all afford;

But we, as in long ages past,
Will still be poets to the last! *

Hark! and list the bridal song,
As they lead the bride along:
"Hear, gentle bride! your mother's sighs,
And you would hence away!
Weep, weep, for tears become those eyes."
——"I cannot weep—to-day."

Hark! the farmer in the mead
Bids the shepherd swain take heed:
"Come, your lambs together fold,
Haste, my sons! your toil is o'er:
For the setting sun has told
That the ox should work no more."

Hark! the cooper in the shade
Sings to the sound his hammer made:
"Strike, comrades, strike! prepare the cask.
'Tis lusty May that fills the flask:
Strike, comrades! summer suns that shine
Fill the cellars full of wine."

Verse is, with us, a charm divine,
Our people, loving verse, will still,
Unknowing of their art, entwine
Garlands of poesy at will.
Their simple language suits them best·
Then let them keep it and be blest.

Let the wise critics build a wall
Between the nurse's cherished voice,
And the fond ear her words enthral,
And say their idol is her choice.

* Jasmin here quotes several *patois* songs, well known in the country.

Yes!—let our fingers feel the rule,
The angry chiding of the school;
True to our nurse, in good or ill,
We are not French, but Gascon still.

'Tis said that age new feeling brings,
Our youth returns as we grow old;
And that we love again the things
Which in our memory had grown cold.
If this be true, the time will come
When to our ancient tongue, once more,
You will return, as to a home,
And thank us that we kept the store.

Remember thou the tale they tell
Of Lacuée and Lacepède,*
When age crept on, who loved to dwell
On words that once their music made;
And, in the midst of grandeur, hung,
Delighted, on their parent tongue.

This will you do: and it may be,
When weary of the world's deceit,
Some summer-day we yet may see
Your coming in our meadows sweet;
Where, midst the flowers, the finch's lay
Shall welcome you with music gay;
While you shall bid our antique tongue
Some word devise, or air supply,
Like those that charm'd your youth so long,
And lent a spell to memory.

Bethink you how we stray'd alone
Beneath those elms in Agen grown,
That each an arch above us throws,
Like giants, hand-in-hand, in rows.

* Both Gascons.

A storm once struck a fav'rite tree,
It trembled, shook, and bent its boughs,—
The vista is no longer free:
Our governor no pause allows;
"Bring hither hatchet, axe, and spade,
The tree must straight be prostrate laid!"

But vainly strength and art were tried,
The stately tree all force defied;
Well might the elm resist and foil their might,
For though his branches were decay'd to sight,
As many as his leaves the roots spread round,
And in the firm set earth they slept profound.

Since then, more full, more green, more gay,
The crests amid the breezes play:
And birds of every note and hue
Come trooping to his shade in Spring;
Each summer they their lays renew,
And while the years endure they sing.

And thus it is, believe me, sir,
With this enchantress—she we call
Our second mother; Frenchmen err
Who, cent'ries since, proclaimed her fall.

No! she still lives, her words still ring,
Her children yet her carols sing;
And thousand years may roll away
Before her magic notes decay.

*September 2nd*, 1837.

## THE MASON'S SON.*

[La Semmâno d'un Fil.]

Riches, n'oubliez pas un seul petit moment
Que des pauvres la grande couvée
Se réveille toujours le sourire à la bouche
Quand elle s'endort sans avoir faire!
(*Riche et Pauvre.*)

### I.

The swallows fly about, although the air is cold,
Our once fair sun has shed his brightest gold.
The fields decay
On All-Saints day.
Ground's hard afoot,
The birds are mute;
The tree-tops shed their chill'd and yellow leaves,
They dying fall, and whirl about in sheaves.

One night, when leaving late a neighb'ring town,
Although the heavens were clear,
Two children paced along, with many a moan—
Brother and sister dear;
And when they reached the wayside cross
Upon their knees they fell, quite close.

Abel and Jane, by the moon's light,
Were long time silent quite;
As they before the altar bend,
With one accord their voices sweet ascend.

* Jasmin says, "the subject of this poem is historical, and recently took place in our neighbourhood."

"Mother of God, Virgin compassionate!
Oh! send thy angel to abate
The sickness of our father dear,
That mother may no longer fear—
And for us both! Oh! Blessed Mother,
We love thee, more and more, we two together!",

The Virgin doubtless heard their prayer,
For, when they reached the cottage near,
The door before them opened wide,
And the dear mother, ere she turned aside,
Cried out: "My children brave,
The fever's gone—your father's life is safe!
Now come, my little lambs, and thank God for His grace."

In their small cot, forthwith the three,
To God in prayer did bend the knee,
Mother and children in their gladness weeping,
While on a sorry bed a man lay sleeping—
It was the father, good Hilaire!
Not long ago, a soldier brave,
But now—a working mason's slave.

## II.

The dawn next day was clear and bright,
The glint of morning sunlight
Gleamed through the windows taper,
Although they only were patched up with paper.

When Abel noiseless entered, with his foot-fall slight,
He slipped along to the bedside;
He oped the little curtain, without stirring of the rings;
His father woke and smiled, with joy that pleasure brings.

"Abel," he said, "I longed for thee; now listen thou to me:
We're very poor indeed—I've nothing save my weekly fee;
But Heaven has helped our lives to save—by curing me.
Dear boy, already thou art fifteen years—
You know to read, to write—then have no fears;
Thou art alone, thou'rt sad, but dream no more,
Thou ought'st to work, for now thou hast the power!
I know thy pain and sorrow, and thy deep alarms;
More good than strong—how could thy little arms
Ply hard the hammer on the stony blocks?
But our hard master, though he likes good looks,
May find thee quite a youth;
He says that thou hast spirit; and he means for thy behoof.
Then do what gives thee pleasure,
Without vain-glory, Abel; and spend thy precious leisure
In writing or in working—each is a labour worthy,
Either with pen or hammer—they are the tools most lofty;
Labour in mind or body, they do fatigue us ever—
But then, Abel my son, I hope that never
One blush upon you e'er will gather
To shame the honour of your father."

Abel's blue eyes were bright with bliss and joy—
Father rejoiced—four times embraced the boy;
Mother and daughter mixed their tears and kisses,
Then Abel saw the master, to his happiness,
And afterwards four days did pass,
All full of joyfulness.
But pleasure with the poor is always unenduring.

A brutal order had been given on Sunday morning
That if, next day, the father did not show his face,
Another workman, in that case,
Would be employed to take his place!
A shot of cannon filled with grape
Could not have caused such grief,
As this most cruel order gives
To these four poor unfortunates.

"I'm cured!" Hilaire cried; "let me rise and dress;"
He tried—fell back; and then he must confess
He could not labour for another week!
Oh, wretched plight—
For him, his work was life!
Should he keep sick, 'twas death!
All four sat mute; sudden a ray of hope
Beamed in the soul of Abel.
He brushed the tear-drops from his een,
Assumed a manly mien,

Strength rushed into his little arms,
On his bright face the blushes came;
He rose at once, and went to reason
With that cruel master mason.

Abel returned, with spirits bright,
No longer trembling with affright;
At once he gaily cries,
With laughing mouth and laughing eyes:—

"My father! take your rest; have faith and courage.
Take all the week, then thou shalt work apace;
Some one, who loves thee well, will take thy place,
Then thou may'st go again and show thy face."

III.

Saved by a friend, indeed! He yet had friends in store!
Oh! how I wish that in this life so lonely. . . .
But, all will be explained at work on Monday;
There are good friends as yet—perhaps there's many more.

It was indeed our Abel took his father's place.
At office first he showed his face;
Then to the work-yard: thus his father he beguiled.
Spite of his slender mien, he worked and always smiled.
He was as deft as workmen twain; he dressed
The stones, and in the mortar then he pressed
The heavy blocks; the workmen found him cheerful.
Mounting the ladder like a bird:
He skipped across the rafters fearful.
He smiled as he ascended, smiled as he descended—
The very masons trembled at his hardiness:
But he was working for his father—in his gladness,
His life was full of happiness;
His brave companions loved the boy
Who filled their little life with joy.
They saw the sweat run down his brow,
And clapped their hands, though weary he was now.

What bliss of Abel, when the day's work's o'er,
And the bright stars were shining:
Unto the office he must go,;
And don his better clothing—
Thus his poor father to deceive, who thought he went a-clerking.
He took his paper home and wrote, 'midst talk with Jane so shyly,
And with a twinkling eye he answered mother's looks so slyly.

Three days thus passed, and the sick man arose;
Life now appeared to him a sweet repose.
On Thursday, tempting was the road;
At midday, Friday, he must walk abroad.

But, fatal Friday—God has made for sorrow.

The father, warmed up by the sun's bright ray,
Hied to the work-yard, smiling by the way;
He wished to thank the friend who worked for him,
But saw him not—his eyes were dim—
Yet he was near; and looking up, he saw no people working,
No dinner-bell had struck, no workmen sure were lurking.
Oh, God! what's happened at the building yard?
A crowd collected—master, mason—as on guard.
"What's this?" the old man cried. "Alas! some man has fallen!"
Perhaps it was his friend! His soul with grief was burning.
He ran. Before him thronged the press of men,
They tried to thrust him back again;
But no; Hilaire pressed through the crowd of working men.
Oh, wretched father—man unfortunate;
The friend who saved thee was thy child—sad fate!
Now he has fallen from the ladder's head,
And lies a bleeding mass, now nearly dead!

Now Hilaire uttered a most fearful cry;
The child had given his life, now he might die.
Alas! the bleeding youth
Was in his death-throes, he could scarcely breathe;

"Master," he said, "I've not fulfilled my task,
But, in the name of my poor mother dear,
For the day lost, take father on at last."

The father heard, o'erwhelmed he was with fear,
Abel now saw him, felt that he was near,
Inclined his head upon his breast, and praying—
Hand held in hand, he smiled on him while dying.

For Hilary, his place was well preserved,
His wages might perhaps be doubled.

Too late! too late! one saddened morn
The sorrow of his life was gone;
And the good father, with his pallid face,
Went now to take another place
Within the tomb, beside his much loved son.

## THE POOR MAN'S DOCTOR.

[Lou Medici des Paùres.]

*Dedicated to* M. Cany, *Physician of Toulouse.*

With the permission of the Rev. Dr. J. Duncan Craig, of Glenagary, Kingston, Dublin, I adopt, with some alterations, his free translation of Jasmin's poem.

Sweet comes this April morning, its faint perfumes exhaling;
Brilliant shines the sun, so crisp, so bright, so freshening;

Pearl-like gleam and sparkle the dew-drops on the rose,
While grey and gnarled olives droop like giants in repose.

Soundeth low, solemnly, the mid-day bell in th' air,
Glideth on sadly a maiden sick with care;
Her head is bent, and sobbing words she sheds with many a tear,
But 'tween the chapel and the windmill another doth appear.

She laughs and plucks the lovely flowers with many a joyous bound,
The other, pale and spiritless, looks upward from the ground;
"Where goest thou, sweet Marianne, this lovely April day?"
"Beneath the elms of Agen—there lies my destined way.

"I go to seek this very day the Doctor of the Poor.*
Did'st thou not hear how skilfully he did my mother cure?
Behold this silver in my hand, these violets so sweet,
The guerdon of his loving care—I'll lay them at his feet.

"Now, dost thou not remember, my darling Marianne,
How in our lonely hut the typhus fever ran?

* In the last edition of Jasmin's poems (4 vols. 8vo, edited by Boyer d'Agen) it is stated (p. 40, 1st vol.) that "M. Durand, physician, was one of those rare men whom Providence seems to have provided to assuage the lot of the poorest classes. His career was full of noble acts of devotion towards the sick whom he was called upon to cure. He died at the early age of thirty-five, of a stroke of apoplexy. His remains were accompanied to the grave by nearly all the poor of Agen and the neighbourhood.

And we were poor, without a friend, or e'en our daily bread,
And sadly then, and sorrowful, dear mother bowed her head.

"One day, the sun was shining low in lurid western sky,
All, all, our little wealth was gone, and mother yearned to die,
When sudden, at the open door, a shadow crossed the way,
And cheerfully a manly voice did words of comfort say:

"'Take courage, friends, your ills I know, your life I hope to save.'
'Too late!' dear mother cried; 'too late! My home is in the grave;
Our things are pledged, our med'cine gone, e'en bread we cannot buy.'
The doctor shudder'd, then grew pale, but sadly still drew nigh.

"No curtains had we on our bed: I marked his pallid face;
Five silver crowns now forth he drew with melancholy grace—
'Poor woman, take these worthless coins, suppress your bitter grief!
Don't blush; repay them when you can—these drops will give relief.'

"He left the hut, and went away; soon sleep's refreshing calm
Relieved the patient he had helped—a wonder-working balm;

The world now seemed to smile again, like springtide flowers so gay,
While mother, brothers, and myself, incessant worked away.

"Thus, like the swallows which return with spring unto our shore,
The doctor brought rejoicing back unto our vine-wreathed door;
And we are happy, Isabel, and money too we've made;
But why dost weep, when I can laugh?" the gentle maiden said.

"Alas! alas! dear Marianne, I weep and mourn to-day,
From your house to our cottage-home the fever made its way;
My father lies with ghastly face, and many a raving cry—
Oh, would that Durand too might come, before the sick man die!"

"Dear Isabel, haste on, haste on—we'll seek his house this hour!
Come, let us run, and hasten on with all our utmost power.
He'll leave the richest palace for the poor man's humble roof—
He's far from rich, except in love, of that we've had full proof!"

The good God bless the noble heart that careth for the poor;
Then forth the panting children speed to seek the sick man's cure;
And as beneath our giant elms they pass with rapid tread,
They scarcely dare to look around, or lift their weary head.

The town at last is reached, by the Pont-Long they enter,
Close by the Rue des Jacobins, near Durand's house they venture.
Around the portals of the door there throngs a mournful crowd;
They see the Cross, they hear the priests the Requiem chaunt aloud.

The girls were troubled in their souls, their minds were rent with grief;
One above all, young Marianne, was trembling like a leaf:
Another death—oh, cruel thought! then of her father dying,
She quickly ran to Durand's door, and asked a neighbour, crying:

"Where's the good doctor, sir, I pray? I seek him for my father!"
He soft replied, "The gracious God into His fold doth gather
The best of poor folks' doctors now, to his eternal rest;
They bear the body forth, 'tis true: his spirit's with the blest."

Bright on his corpse the candles shine around his narrow bier,
Escorted by the crowds of poor with many a bitter tear;
No more, alas! can he the sad and anguished-laden cure—
Oh, wail! For Durand is no more—the Doctor of the Poor!

## MY VINEYARD.*

[Ma Bigno.]

*To* Madame Louis Veill, *Paris.*

Dear lady, it is true, that last month I have signed
A little scrap of parchment; now myself I find
The master of a piece of ground
Within the smallest bound—
Not, as you heard, a spacious English garden
Covered with flowers and trees, to shrine your bard in—
But of a tiny little vineyard,
Which I have christened "Papilhôto"!
Where, for a chamber, I have but a grotto.
The vine-stocks hang about their boughs,
At other end a screen of hedgerows,
So small they do not half unroll;
A hundred would not make a mile,
Six sheets would cover the whole pile.

Well! as it is, of this I've dreamt for twenty years—
You laugh, Madame, at my great happiness,
Perhaps you'll laugh still more, when it appears,
That when I bought the place, I must confess
There were no fruits,
Though rich in roots;
Nine cherry trees—behold my wood!
Ten rows of vines—my promenade!
A few peach trees; the hazels too;
Of elms and fountains there are two.

---

* Jasmin purchased a little piece of ground, which he dedicated to his "Curl-papers" (Papilhôto), on the road to Scaliger's villa, and addressed the above lines to his lady-admirer in Paris, Madame Louis Veill.

How rich I am! My muse is grateful very;
Oh! might I paint? while I the pencil try,
Our country loves the Heavens so bright and cheery.

Here, verdure starts up as we scratch the ground,
Who owns it, strips it into pieces round;
Beneath our sun there's nought but gayest sound.
You tell me, true, that in your Paris hot-house,
You ripen two months sooner 'neath your glass, of course.
What is your fruit? Mostly of water clear,
The heat may redden what your tendrils bear.
But, lady dear, you cannot live on fruits alone while here!
Now slip away your glossy glove
And pluck that ripened peach above,
Then place it in your pearly mouth
And suck it—how it 'lays your drouth—
Melts in your lips like honey of the South!

Dear Madame, in the North you have great sights—
Of churches, castles, theatres of greatest heights;
Your works of art are greater far than here.
But come and see, quite near
The banks of the Garonne, on a sweet summer's day,
All works of God! and then you'll say
No place more beautiful and gay!
You see the rocks in all their velvet greenery;
The plains are always gold; and mossy very,
The valleys, where we breathe the healthy air,
And where we walk on beds of flowers most fair!

The country round your Paris has its flowers and greensward,
But 'tis too grand a dame for me, it is too dull and sad.
Here, thousand houses smile along the river's stream;
Our sky is bright, it laughs aloud from morn to e'en.

Since month of May, when brightest weather bounds
For six months, music through the air resounds—
A thousand nightingales the shepherd's ears delight:
All sing of Love—Love which is new and bright.
Your Opera, surprised, would silent hearken,
When day for night has drawn aside its curtain,
Under our heavens, which very soon comes glowing.
Listen, good God! our concert is beginning!
What notes! what raptures? Listen, shepherd-swains,
One chaunt is for the hill-side, the other's for the plains.

"Those lofty mountains
Far up above,
I cannot see
All that I love;
Move lower, mountains,
Plains, up-move,
That I may see
All that I love." *

And thousand voices sound through Heaven's alcove,
Coming across the skies so blue,
Making the angels smile above—
The earth embalms the songsters true;
The nightingales, from tree to flower,
Sing louder, fuller, stronger.
'Tis all so sweet, though no one beats the measure,
To hear it all while concerts last—such pleasure!
Indeed my vineyard's but a seat of honour,
For, from my hillock, shadowed by my bower,
I look upon the fields of Agen, the valley of Verone.†
How happy am I 'mongst my vines! Such pleasures
there are none.

* From a popular song by Gaston Phébus.
† Referring to Verona, the villa of Scaliger, the great scholar.

For here I am the poet-dresser, working for the wines.
I only think of propping up my arbours and my vines;
Upon the road I pick the little stones—
And take them to my vineyard to set them up in cones,
And thus I make a little house with but a sheltered door—
As each friend, in his turn, now helps to make the store.
And then there comes the vintage—the ground is firm and fast,
With all my friends, with wallets or with baskets cast,
We then proceed to gather up the fertile grapes at last.

Oh! my young vine,
The sun's bright shine
Hath ripened thee
All—all for me!
No drizzling showers
Have spoilt the hours.
My muse can't borrow;
My friends, to-morrow
Cannot me lend;
But thee, young friend,
Grapes nicely drest,
With figs the finest
And raisins gather
Bind them together!
Th' abundant season
Will still us bring
A glorious harvesting;
Close up thy hands with bravery
Upon the luscious grapery!

Now all push forth their tendrils; though not past remedy,
At th' hour when I am here, my faithful memory
Comes crowding back; my oldest friends

Now make me young again—for pleasure binds
Me to their hearts and minds.
But now the curtained night comes on again.

I see the meadows sweet around,
My little island, midst the varying ground,
Where I have often laughed, and sometimes I have groaned.

I see far off the leafy woodland,
Or near the fountain, where I've often dreamed;
Long time ago there was a famous man *
Who gave its fame to Agen.
I who but write these verses slight
Midst thoughts of memory bright.

But I will tell you all—in front, to left, to right,
More than a hedgerow thick that I have brought the light,
More than an apple-tree that I have trimmed,
More than an old vine-stalk that I have thinned
To ripen lovely Muscat.
Madame, you see that I look back upon my past,
Without a blush at last;
What would you? That I gave my vineyard back—
And that with usury? Alack!
And yet unto my garden I've no door—
Two thorns are all my fence—no more!
When the marauders come, and through a hole I see their nose,
Instead of taking up a stick to give them blows,
I turn aside; perhaps they never may return, the horde!
He who young robs, when older lets himself be robbed!

* Scaliger.

## FRANCONNETTE.

### First Part.

Blaise de Montluc—Festival at Roquefort—The Prettiest Maiden—The Soldier and the Shepherds—Kissing and Panting—Courage of Pascal—Fury of Marcel—Terrible Contest.

'Twas at the time when Blaise the murderous
Struck heavy blows by force of arms.
He hewed the Protestants to pieces,
And, in the name of God the Merciful,
Flooded the earth with sorrow, blood, and tears.

Alas! 'twas pitiful—far worse beyond the hills,
Where flashing gun and culverin were heard;
There the unhappy bore their heavy cross,
And suffered, more than elsewhere, agonising pain,
Were killed and strangled, tumbled into wells;
'Tween *Penne* and *Fumel* the saddened earth was gorged.
Men, women, children, murdered everywhere,
The hangman even stopped for breath;
While Blaise, with heart of steel, dismounted at the gate
Of his strong castle wall,
With triple bridge and triple fosse;
Then kneeling, made his pious prayers,
Taking the Holy Sacrament,
His hands yet dripping with fraternal blood! *

* Blaise de Montluc, Marshal of France, was one of the bitterest persecutors of the Huguenots. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, Agen was a centre of Protestantism. The town was taken again and again by the contending religious factions. When Montluc retook the place, in 1562, from Truelle, the Huguenot captain, he found that the inhabitants had fled, and there was no

Now every shepherd, every shepherd lass,
At the word *Huguenot* shuddered with affright,
Even 'midst their laughing courtship.
And yet it came to pass
That in a hamlet, 'neath a castled height,
One Sunday, when a troop of sweethearts danced
Upon the day of Roquefort fête,
And to a fife the praises sang
Of Saint James and the August weather—
That bounteous month which year by year,
Through dew-fall of the evening bright,
And heat of Autumn noons doth bring
Both grapes and figs to ripening.

It was the finest fête that eyes had ever seen
Under the shadow of the leafy parasol,
Where aye the country-folk convene.
O'erflowing were the spaces all,
From cliff, from dale, from every home
Of Montagnac and Sainte-Colombe,
Still they do come,
Too many far to number;
More, ever more, while flames the sunshine o'er,
There's room for all, their coming will not cumber,
The fields shall be their chamber, and the little hillocks green
The couches of their slumber.

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one to butcher (*Gascogne et Languedoc*, par Paul Joanne, p. 95). Montluc made up for his disappointment by laying waste the country between Fumel and Penne, towns to the north of Agen, and slaying all the Huguenots—men, women, and children—on whom he could lay his hands. He then returned to his castle of Estillac, devoted himself to religious exercises, and "took the sacrament," says Jasmin, "while his hands were dripping with fraternal blood." Montluc died in 1577, and was buried in the garden of Estillac, where a monument, the ruins of which still exist, was erected over his remains.

What pleasure! what delight! the sun now fills the air;
The sweetest thing in life
Is the music of the fife
And the dancing of the fair.
You see their baskets emptying
Of waffles all home-made.
They quaff the nectar sparkling
Of freshest lemonade.
What crowds at Punchinello,
While the showman beats his cymbal!
Crowds everywhere!
But who is this appears below?
Ah! 'tis the beauteous village queen!
Yes, 'tis she; 'tis Franconnette!
A fairer girl was never seen.

In the town as in the prairie,
You must know that every country
Has its chosen pearl of love.
Ah, well! This was the one—
They named her in the Canton,
The prettiest, sweetest dove.

But now, you must not fancy, gentlemen,
That she was sad and sighing,
Her features pale as any lily,
That she had dying eyes, half-shut and blue,
And slender figure clothed with languishing,
Like to a weeping willow by a limpid lake.
Not so, my masters. Franconnette
Had two keen flashing eyes, like two live stars;
Her laughing cheeks were round, whereon a lover might
Gather in handfuls roses bright;
Brown locks and curly decked her head;

Her lips were as the cherry red,
Whiter than snow her teeth; her feet
How softly moulded, small and fleet;
How light her limbs! Ah, well-a-day!
And of the whole at once I say,
She was the very beau-ideal
Of beauty in a woman's form, most fair and real.

Such loveliness, in every race,
May sudden start to light.
She fired the youths with ready love,
Each maiden with despair.
Poor youths, indeed! Oh! how they wished
To fall beneath her feet!
They all admired her, and adored,
Just as the priest adores the cross —
'Twas as if there shone a star of light
The young girl's brow across!

Yet, something vexing in her soul began to hover;
The finest flower had failed her in this day of honour.
Pascal, whom all the world esteemed,
Pascal, the handsomest, whose voice with music beamed,
He shunned the maid, cast ne'er a loving glance;
Despised! She felt hate growing in her heart,
And in her pretty vengeance
She seized the moment for a brilliant dart
Of her bright eyes to chain him.
What would you have? A girl so greatly envied,
She might become a flirt conceited;
Already had she seemed all this,
Self-glorious she was, I fear,
Coquetting rarely comes amiss,
Though she might never love, with many lovers near!

Grandmother often said to her, "Child, child!" with gentle frown,
"A meadow's not a parlour, and the country's not a town,
And thou knowest well that we have promised thee lang syne
To the soldier-lad, Marcel, who is lover true of thine.
So curb thy flights, thou giddy one,
The maid who covets all, in the end mayhap hath none."
"Nay, nay," replied the tricksy fay,
With swift caress, and laughter gay,
"There is another saw well-known,
Time enough, my grannie dear, to love some later day!
'*She who hath only one, hath none.*'"

Now, such a flighty course, you may divine,
Made hosts of melancholy swains,
Who sighed and suffered jealous pains,
Yet never sang reproachful strains,
Like learned lovers when they pine,
Who, as they go to die, their woes write carefully
On willow or on poplar tree.
Good lack! thou could'st not shape a letter,
And the silly souls, though love-sick, to death did not incline,
Thinking to live and suffer on were better!
But tools were handled clumsily,
And vine-sprays blew abroad at will,
And trees were pruned exceeding ill,
And many a furrow drawn awry.

Methinks you know her now, this fair and foolish girl;
Watch while she treads one measure, then see her dip and twirl!

Young Etienne holds her hand by chance,
'Tis the first rigadoon they dance;
With parted lips, right thirstily
Each rustic tracks them as they fly,
And the damsel sly
Feels every eye,
And lighter moves for each adoring glance.
Holy cross! what a sight! when the madcap rears aright
Her shining lizard's head! her Spanish foot falls light,
Her wasp-like figure sways
And swims and whirls and springs again.
The wind with corner of her 'kerchief plays.
Those lovely cheeks whereon the youths now gaze,
They hunger to salute with kisses twain!

And someone shall; for here the custom is,
Who tires his partner out, salutes her with a kiss;
The girls grow weary everywhere,
Wherefore already Jean and Paul,
Louis, Guillaume, and strong Pierre,
Have breathless yielded up their place
Without the coveted embrace.

Another takes his place, Marcel the wight,
The soldier of Montluc, prodigious in his height,
Arrayed in uniform, bearing his sword,
A cockade in his cap, the emblem of his lord,
Straight as an I, though bold yet not well-bred,
His heart was soft, but thickish was his head.
He blustered much and boasted more and more,
Frolicked and vapoured as he took the floor.
Indeed he was a very horrid bore.
Marcel, most mad for Franconnette, tortured the other girls,
Made her most jealous, yet she had no chance,
The swelled-out coxcomb called on her to dance.

But Franconnette was loth, and she must let him see it;
He felt most madly jealous, yet was maladroit,
He boasted that he was beloved; perhaps he did believe it quite—
The other day, in such a place,
She shrank from his embrace!

The crowd now watched the dancing pair,
And marked the tricksy witching fair;
They rush, they whirl! But what's amiss?
The bouncing soldier lad, I wis,
Can never snatch disputed kiss!

The dancing maid at first smiles at her self-styled lover,
"Makes eyes" at him, but ne'er a word does utter;
She only leaped the faster!
Marcel, piqued to the quick, longed to subdue this creature,
He wished to show before the crowd what love he bore her;
One open kiss were sweeter far
Than twenty in a corner!
But, no! his legs began to fail, his head was in a trance,
He reeled, he almost fell, he could no longer dance;
Now he would give cockade, sabre, and silver lace,
Would it were gold indeed, for her embrace!

Yet while the pair were still afoot, the girl looked very gay—
Resolved never to give way!
While headstrong Marcel, breathless, spent, and hot in face,
He reeled and all but fell; then to the next gave place!
Forth darted Pascal in the soldier's stead,
They make two steps, then change, and Franconnette,

Weary at last, with laughing grace,
Her foot stayed and upraised her face!
Tarried Pascal that kiss to set?
Not he, be sure! and all the crowd
His vict'ry hailed with plaudits loud.
The clapping of their palms like battle-dores resounded,
While Pascal stood among them quite confounded!

Oh, what a picture for the soldier who so loved his queen!
Him the kiss maddened! Measuring Pascal with his
een,
He thundered, "Peasant, you have filled my place most
sly;
Not so fast, churl!"—and brutally let fly
With aim unerring one fierce blow,
Straight in the other's eyes, doubling the insult so.

Good God!* how stings the madd'ning pain,
His dearest happiness that blow must stain,
Kissing and boxing—glory, shame!
Light, darkness! Fire, ice! Life, death! Heaven, hell!
All this was to our Pascal's soul the knell
Of hope! But to be thus tormented
By flagrant insult, as the soldier meant it;
Now without fear he must resent it!
It does not need to be a soldier nor a "Monsieur,"
An outrage placidly to bear.
Now fiery Pascal let fly at his foe,
Before he could turn round, a stunning blow;
'Twas like a thunder peal,
And made the soldier reel;
Trying to draw his sabre,
But Pascal, seeming bigger,
Gripped Marcel by the waist, and sturdily

* Jour de Dieu!

Lifted him up, and threw his surly
Foe on the ground, breathless, and stunned severely.

"Now then!" while Pascal looked on the hound thrown by him,
"The peasant grants thee chance of living!"
"Despatch him!" cried the surging crowd.
"Thou art all cover'd o'er with blood!"
But Pascal, in his angry fit of passion,
Had hurt his wrist and fist in a most serious fashion.

"No matter! All the same I pardon him!
You must have pity on the beaten hound!"
"No, finish him! Into morsels cut him!"
The surging, violent crowd now cried around.
"Back, peasants, back! Do him no harm!"
Sudden exclaimed a Monsieur, speaking with alarm;
The peasants moved aside, and then gave place
To Montluc, glittering with golden lace;
It was the Baron of Roquefort!

The frightened girls, like hunted hares,
At once dispers'd, flew here and there.
The shepherds, but a moment after,
With thrilling fife and beaming laughter,
The brave and good Pascal attended on his way,
Unto his humble home, as 'twere his nuptial day.

But Marcel, furious, mad with rage, exclaimed,
"Oh! could I stab and kill them! But I'm maimed!"
Only a gesture of his lord
Restrained him, hand upon his sword.
Then did he grind his teeth, as he lay battered,
And in a low and broken voice he muttered:
"They love each other, and despise my kindness,
She favours him, and she admires his fondness;

Ah, well! by Marcel's patron, I'll not tarry
To make them smart, and Franconnette
No other husband than myself shall marry!"

## Second Part.

The Enamoured Blacksmith—His Fretful Mother—The Busking Soirée—Pascal's Song—The Sorcerer of the Black Forest—The Girl Sold to the Demon.

Since Roquefort fête, one, two, three months have fled;
The dancing frolic, with the harvest ended;
The out-door sports are banished—
For winter comes; the air is sad and cold, it sighs
Under the vaulted skies.
At fall of night, none risks to walk across the fields,
For each one, sad and cheerless, beelds
Before the great fires blazing,
Or talks of wolfish fiends* amazing;
And sorcerers—to make one shudder with affright—
That walk around the cots so wight,
Or 'neath the gloomy elms, and by farmyards at night.

But now at last has Christmas come,
And little Jack, who beats the drum,
Cries round the hamlet, with his beaming face:
"Come brisken up, you maidens fair,
A merry busking† shall take place
On Friday, first night of the year!"

* Wehr-wolves, wizard wolves—*loup-garou*. Superstitions respecting them are known in Brittany and the South of France.

† Miss Harriett W. Preston, in her article on Jasmin's *Franconnette* in the *Atlantic Monthly* for February, 1876, says: "The *buscou*, or busking, was a kind of *tee*, at which the young people assembled, bringing the thread of their late spinning, which was

Ah! now the happy youths and maidens fair
Proclaimed the drummer's words, so bright and rare.
The news were carried far and near
Light as a bird most fleet
With wings to carry thoughts so sweet.
The sun, with beaming rays, had scarcely shone
Ere everywhere the joyous news had flown;
At every fireside they were known,
By every hearth, in converse keen,
The busking was the theme.

But when the Friday came, a frozen dew was raining,
And by a fireless forge a mother sat complaining;
And to her son, who sat thereby,
She spoke at last entreatingly:
"Hast thou forgot the summer day, my boy, when thou didst come
All bleeding from the furious fray, to the sound of music home?
How I have suffered for your sorrow,
And all that you have had to go through.
Long have I troubled for your arm! For mercy's sake
Oh! go not forth to-night! I dreamt of flowers again,
And what means that, Pascal, but so much tears and pain!"

"Now art thou craven, mother! and see'st that life's all black,
But wherefore tremble, since Marcel has gone, and comes not back!"

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divided into skeins of the proper size by a broad thin plate of steel or whalebone called a *busc*. The same thing, under precisely the same name, figured in the toilets of our grandmothers, and hence, probably, the Scotch use of the verb to *busk*, or attire." Jamieson (*Scottish Dictionary*) says: "The term *busk* is employed in a beautiful proverb which is very commonly used in Scotland, 'A bonny bride is soon busked.'"

"Oh yet, my son, do you take heed, I pray!
For the wizard of the Black Wood is roaming round this way;
The same who wrought such havoc, 'twas but a year agone,
They tell me one was seen to come from 's cave at dawn
But two days past—it was a soldier; now
What if this were Marcel? Oh, my child, do take care!
Each mother gives her charms unto her sons; do thou
Take mine; but I beseech, go not forth anywhere!"

"Just for one little hour, mine eyes to set
On my friend Thomas, whom I'm bound to meet!"

"Thy friend, indeed! Nay, nay! Thou meanest Franconnette,
Whom thou loves dearly! I wish thou'd love some other maid!
Oh, yes! I read it in thine eyes!
Though thou sing'st, art gay, thy secret bravely keeping,
That I may not be sad, yet all alone thou'rt weeping—
My head aches for thy misery;
Yet leave her, for thine own good, my dear Pascal;
She would so greatly scorn a working smith like thee,
With mother old in penury;
For poor we are—thou knowest truly.

"How we have sold and sold till scarce a scythe remains.
Oh, dark the days this house hath seen,
Since, Pascal, thou so ill hast been;
Now thou art well, arouse! do something for our gains!

Or rest thee, if thou wilt; with suffering we can fight:
But, for God's love, oh! go not forth to-night!"

And the poor mother, quite undone,
Cried, while thus pleading with her son,
Who, leaning on his blacksmith's forge
The stifling sobs quelled in his gorge.
"'Tis very true," he said, "that we are poor,
But had I that forgot? . . . I go to work, my mother, now, be sure!"

No sooner said than done; for in a blink
Was heard the anvil's clink,
The sparks flew from the blacksmith's fire
Higher and still higher!
The forgeman struck the molten iron dead,
Hammer in hand, as if he had a hundred in his head!

But now, the Busking was apace,
And soon, from every corner place
The girls came with the skein of their own making
To wind up at this sweethearts' merry meeting.

In the large chamber, where they sat and winded
The threads, all doubly garnished,
The girls, the lads, plied hard their finger,
And swiftly wound together
The clews of lint so fair,
As fine as any hair.

The winding now was done; and the white wine, and rhymsters,
Came forth with rippling glass and porringers,
And brought their vivid vapours
To brighten up their capers—
Ah! if the prettiest were the best, with pride
I would my Franconnette describe.

Though queen of games, she was the last, not worst,
It is not that she reigned at present, yet was first.

"Hold! Hold!" she cried, the brown-haired maid,
Now she directed them from side to side—
Three women merged in one, they said—
She dances, speaks, sings, all bewitching,
By maiden's wiles she was so rich in;
She sings with soul of turtle-dove,
She speaks with grace angelic;
She dances on the wings of love—
Sings, speaks, and dances, in a guise
More than enough to turn the head most wise!

Her triumph is complete; all eyes are fixed upon her,
Though her adorers are but peasants;
Her eyes are beaming,
Blazing and sparkling,
And quite bewitching;
No wonder that the sweetheart lads are ravished with her!

Then Thomas rose and, on the coquette fixing
His ardent eyes, though blushing,
In language full of neatness,
And tones of lute-like sweetness,
This song began to sing:

THE SYREN WITH A HEART OF ICE.

"Oh, tell us, charming Syren,
With heart of ice unmoved,
When shall we hear the sound
Of bells that ring around,
To say that you have loved?
Always so free and gay,
Those wings of dazzling ray,

Are spread to every air—
And all your favour share;
Attracted by their light
All follow in your flight.
But ah! believe me, 'tis not bliss,
Such triumphs do but purchase pain;
What is it to be loved like this,
To her who cannot love again?

"You've seen how full of joy
We've marked the sun arise;
Even so each Sunday morn
When you, before our eyes,
Bring us such sweet surprise.
With us new life is born:
We love your angel face,
Your step so *débonnaire*,
Your mien of maiden grace,
Your voice, your lips, your hair,
Your eyes of gentle fire,
All these we now admire!
But ah! believe me, 'tis not bliss,
Such triumphs do but purchase pain;
What is it to be loved like this,
To her who cannot love again?

"Alas! our groves are dull
When widowed of thy sight,
And neither hedge nor field
Their perfume seem to yield;
The blue sky is not bright
When you return once more,
All that was sad is gone,
All nature you restore,
We breathe in you alone;

We could your rosy fingers cover
With kisses of delight all over!
But ah! believe me, 'tis not bliss,
Such triumphs do but purchase pain;
What is it to be loved like this,
To her who cannot love again?

"The dove you lost of late,
Might warn you by her flight,
She sought in woods her mate,
And has forgot you quite;
She has become more fair
Since love has been her care.
'Tis love makes all things gay,
Oh follow where she leads—
When beauteous looks decay,
What dreary life succeeds!
And ah! believe me, perfect bliss,
A joy, where peace and triumph reign,
Is when a maiden, loved like this,
Has learnt 'tis sweet to love again!"

The songster finished, and the ardent crowd
Of listeners clapped their hands in praises loud.

"Oh! what a lovely song!" they cried. "Who is the poet?"
"'Tis Pascal," answered Thomas, "that has made it!"
"Bravo! Long live Pascal!" exclaimed the fervent crowd.

Nothing said Franconnette; but she rejoiced — was proud—
At having so much love evoked,
And in a song so touching,
Before this crowd admiring.

Then she became more serious as she thought of Pascal;
"How brave he is! 'Tis all for him; he has not got
his equal!
How he paints love! All praise him without doubt;
And his sweet song—so touching!" for now by heart
she knows it.
"But if he loves at last, why does he hide away?"
Then turning suddenly, she says—
"Thomas, he is not here, away he stays;
I would him compliment; can he not come?"
"Oh! now he cannot; but remains at home."

Then spoke the jealous Lawrence: "Pascal knows
He cannot any other songs compose;
Poor fellow! almost ruined quite he is;
His father's most infirm—stretched out, and cannot
rise;
The baker will not give him bread, he is constrained
to debts."

Then Franconnette grew pale, and said, "And he so
very good!
Poor lad! how much he suffers; and now he wants
his food!"

"My faith!" said Lawrence, a heart of goodness aping,
"They say that now he goes a-begging!"
"You lie!" cried Thomas, "hold thy serpent's tongue!
Pascal, 'tis true, is working, yet with harm,
Since, for this maiden, he has suffered in his arm;
But he is cured; heed not this spiteful knave!
He works now all alone, for he is strong and brave."
If someone on the girl his eyes had set,
He would have seen tears on the cheeks of Franconnette.

"Let's 'Hunt the Slipper!'" cried the maids;
Round a wide ring they sat, the jades.
Slipper was hid by Franconnette,
But in a twinkle, Marionette—
"Lawrence, hast thou my slipper?" "No, demoiselle!"
"Rise then, and seek it now, ah, well!"
Lawrence, exulting in his features,
Said, "Franconnette, hast thou my slipper?"
"No, sir!" "'Tis false!" It was beneath her seat!
"Thou hast it! Rise! Now kiss me as the forfeit!"

A finch, just taken in a net,
First tries some gap to fly at;
So Franconnette, just like a bird, escaped
With Lawrence, whom she hated;
Incensed he turned to kiss her;
He swiftly ran, but in his pursuit warm,
The moment she was caught he stumbled,
Slipped, fell, and sudden broke his arm.

Misfortunes ne'er come single, it is said.
The gloomy night was now far spent;
But in that fright of frights, quite in a breath,
The house-door creaked and ope'd! Was it a wraith?
No! but an old man bearded to the waist,
And now there stood before the throng the Black Wood Ghaist!
"Imprudent youths!" he cried; "I come from gloomy rocks up yonder,
Your eyes to ope: I'm filled with wrath and wonder!
You all admire this Franconnette;
Learn who she is, infatuate!

From very cradle she's all evil;
Her wretched father, miserable,

Passed to the Huguenots and sold her to the Devil;
Her mother died of shame—
And thus the demon plays his game.
Now he has bought this woman base,
He tracks her in her hiding-place.
You see how he has punished Pascal and Lawrence
Because they gave her light embrace!
Be warned! For whoso dares this maid to wed,
Amid the brief delight of their first nuptial night,
Will sudden hear a thunder-peal o'er head!
The demon cometh in his might
To snatch the bride away in fright,
And leave the ill-starred bridegroom dead!"

The Wizard said no more; but angry, fiery rays,
From scars his visage bore, seemed suddenly to blaze.
Four times he turned his heel upon,
Then bade the door stand wide, or ere his foot he stayed;
With one long creak the door obeyed,
And lo! the bearded ghaist was gone!

He left great horror in his wake! None stirred in all the throng;
They looked nor left nor right, when he away had gone,
They seemed all changed to stone—
Only the stricken maid herself stood brave against her wrong;
And in the hope forlorn that all might pass for jest,
With tremulous smile, half bright, half pleading,
She swept them with her eyes, and two steps forward pressed;
But when she saw them all receding,
And heard them cry "Avaunt!" then did she know her fate;

Then did her saddened eyes dilate
With speechless terror more and more,
The while her heart beat fast and loud,
Till with a cry her head she bowed
And sank in swoon upon the floor.
Such was the close of Busking night,
Though it began so gay and bright;
The morrow was the New Year's day,
It should have been a time most gay;
But now there went abroad a fearful rumour—
It was remembered long time after
In every house and cottage home throughout the land—
Though 'twas a fiction and a superstition,—
It was, "The De'il's abroad! He's now a-roaming;
How dreadful! He is now for lost souls seeking!"

The folks were roused and each one called to mind
That some, in times of yore, had heard the sound
Of Devil's chains that clanked;
How soon the father vanished,
The mother, bent in agony,
A maniac she died!
That then all smiled; they felt nor hurt nor harm,
They lived quite happy on their cottage farm,
And when the fields were spoilt with hail or rain,
Their ground was covered o'er with plums and grain.

It was enough; the girls believed it all,
Grandmothers, mothers—thoughts did them appal—
Even infants trembled at the demon's name;
And when the maiden hung her head in pain,
And went abroad, they scarce would give her passage;
They called to her, "Away! Avaunt! thou imp of evil,
Behold the crime of dealing with the Devil!"

## Third Part.

The Maid at Estanquet—A Bad Dream—The Grandmother's Advice—Blessed Bread—Satisfaction and Affection—First Thought of Love—Sorrowfulness—The Virgin.

Beside a cot at Estanquet,
Down by a leafy brooklet,
The limpid stream
Enshadowed sheen,
Lapped o'er the pebbles murmuring.
Last summer sat a maid, with gathered flowers,
She was engaged in setting,
Within her grassy bowers;
She sang in joy her notes so thrilling,
As made the birds, their sweet songs trilling,
Most jealous.

Why does she sing no more? midst fields and hedgerows verdant;
The nightingales that came within her garden,
With their loud "jug! jug!" warbling,
And their sweet quavers singing;
Can she have left her cottage home?

No! There's her pretty hat of straw
Laid on the bench; but then they saw
There was no ribbon round it;
The garden all neglected;
The rake and wat'ring-pot were down
Amongst the jonquils overthrown;
The broken-branched roses running riot;
The dandelion, groundsell, all about;
And the nice walks, laid out with so much taste,
Now cover'd with neglected weeds and wanton waste.

Oh! what has happened here? Where is the lively maid?
The little birds now whispering said;
Her home is sparkling there beyond,
With tufted branch of hazel round;
Let's just peep in, the door is open,
We make no noise, but let us listen.
Ah! there's grandmother, on her arm-chair, fast asleep!
And here, beside the casement deep,
The maid of Estanquet, in saddened pain and grief,
The tears down-falling on her pretty hand;
To whom no joy nor hope can ever give relief!

Ah! yes, 'twas dark enough! for it is Franconnette,
Already you've divined it is our pet!

And see her now, poor maiden,
Bending beneath the falsest blow, o'erladen;
She sobs and weeps alternately—
Her heart is rent and empty,
Oft, to console herself, she rises, walks, and walks again;
Alas! her trouble is so full of pain—
Awake or sleeping—
She's only soothed by weeping.
Daughter of Huguenot accursed,
And banished from the Church!
Sold to the demon; she's for ever cursed!
Grandmother, waking, said, "Child, 'tis not true;
It matters not; 'tis but thy father fled,
No one can contradict that raving crew;
They know not where he is, and could they see him,
They would so frightened be, they'd not believe their een!"

"How changed things are," said Franconnette, "before
I was so happy;
Then I was village queen, all followed love in
harmony;
And all the lads, to please me,
Would come barefooted, e'en through serpents' nests, to
bless me!
But now, to be despised and curst,
I, who was once the very first!
And Pascal, too, whom once I thought the best,
In all my misery shuns me like a pest!
Now that he knows my very sad mishaps,
He ne'er consoles with me at all—perhaps——"

She did deceive herself. Her grief to-day was softened
By hearing that Pascal 'gainst slanders her defended;
Such magic help, it was a balm
Her aching soul to calm;
And then, to sweeten all her ill,
She thought always of Pascal—did this softened girl.

What is that sound? A sudden shriek!
Grandmother dreamt—she was now wideawake;
The girl sprang to her; she said, "Isn't the house
aflame?
Ah! twas a dream! Thank God!" her murmur came.

"Dear heart," the girl said softly; "what was this
dream of thine?"
"Oh, love! 'twas night, and loud ferocious men, me-
thought
Came lighting fires all round our little cot,
And thou did'st cry unto them, daughter mine,
To save me, but did'st vainly strive,
For here we too must burn alive!
The torment that I bore! How shall I cure my fright
Come hither, darling, let me hold thee tight!"

Then the white-headed dame, in withered arms of love,
With yearning tenderness folded the brown-haired girl, who strove,
By many a smile, and mute caress,
To hearten her, until at length
The aged one cried out, her love gave vital strength,
"Sold to the Demon, thou? It is a hideous lie!
Therefore, dear child, weep not so piteously;
Take courage! Be thou brave in heart once more,
Thou art more lovely than before—
Take grannie's word for that! Arise!
Go forth; who hides from envious eyes
Makes wicked people spiteful; I've heard this, my pet;
I know full well there's one who loves thee yet—
Marcel would guard thee with his love;
Thou lik'st not him? Ah! could he move
Thy feelings, he would shield thee, dear,
And claim thee for his own.
But I am all too feeble grown;
Yet stay, my darling, stay! To-morrow's Easter Day,
Go thou to Mass, and pray as ne'er before!
Then take the blessed bread, if so the good God may
The precious favour of his former smile restore,
And on thy sweet face, clear as day,
Own thou art numbered with his children evermore!"

Then such a gleam of hope lit the old face again,
Furrowed so deep with years and pain,
That, falling on her neck, the maiden promised well,
And once more on the white cot silence fell.

When, therefore, on the morrow, came the country-side,
To hear the Hallelujas in the church of Saint Pierre;
Great was the wonderment of those that spied
The maiden, Franconnette, silently kneeling there,

Telling her beads with downcast eyes of prayer.
She needs, poor thing, Heaven's mercy to implore,
For ne'er a woman's will she win!
But then, beholding her sweet mien,
Were Marvel and Pascal, eyeing her fondly o'er;
She saw them with her glances, dark as night,
Then shrinking back, they left her all alone,
Midway of a great circle, as they might
Some poor condemned one
Bearing some stigma on her brow in sight.

This was not all, poor child! It was well known—
The warden, uncle to Marcel,
Carried the Blessed Bread;
And like a councillor, did swell
In long-tailed coat, with pompous tread:
But when the trembling maid, making a cross, essayed
To take a double portion, as her dear old grandame bade,
Right in the view of every eye,
The sacred basket he withdrew, and passed her wholly by;
And so, denied her portion of the bread whereby we live,
She, on glad Easter, doth receive
Dismissal from God's house for aye.

The maid, trembling with fear, thought all was lost indeed!
But no! she hath a friend at need;
'Twas Pascal, who had seen her all the while—
Pascal, whose young foot walked along the aisle,
He made the quest, and nothing loth,
In view of uncle and of nephew both,
Doth quietly to her present,

Upon a silver plate, with flowers fair blossoming,
The crown-piece * of the Holy Sacrament—
And all the world beholds the pious offering.

Oh! moment full of joy; her blood sprang into fleetness;
Warmth was in all her frame, her senses thrilled with sweetness;
She saw the bread of God arisen
Out of its earthly prison,
Thus life unto her own was given:
But wherefore did her brow quite blushing grow?
Because the angel bright of love, I trow,
Did with her glowing breath impart
Life to the flame long smouldering in her heart.
It did become a something strange, and passing all desire
As honey sweet, and quick as fire
Did her sad soul illuminate
With a new being; and, though late,
She knew the word for her delight,
The fair enigma she could guess.
People and priest all vanish'd from her sight,
She saw in all the church only one man aright—
He whom she loved at last, with utmost gratefulness.

Then from Saint Peter's church the throng widely dispersed,
And of the scandal they had seen, now eagerly conversed;

* Miss Preston says this was a custom which prevailed in certain parts of France. It was carried by the French emigrants to Canada, where it flourished in recent times. The Sacramental Bread was crowned by one or more frosted or otherwise ornamented cakes, which were reserved for the family of the Seigneur, or other communicants of distinction.

But lost not sight of her at all
Who bore the Bread of Honour to the ancient dame, ere this,
She sitteth now alone, shut in her chamber small,
While Franconnette beams brightly with her new-found bliss.

On the parched earth, where falls the earliest dew,
As shines the sun's first rays, the winter flown—
So love's first spark awakes to life anew,
And fills the startled mind with joy unknown.
The maiden yielded every thought to this—
The trembling certainty of real bliss;
The lightning of a joy before improved,
Flash'd in her heart, and told her that she loved.

She fled from envy, and from curious eyes,
And dreamed, as all have done, their waking dreams,
Bidding in thought bright fairy fabrics rise
To shrine the loved one in their golden gleams.
Alas! the sage is right, 'tis the distrest
Who dream the fondest, and who love the best.

But when the saddened heart controls us quite,
It quickly turns to gall the sweets of our delight.
Then she remembered all! The opening heaven turned grey,
Dread thought now smites her heavily.
Dreams she of love? Why, what is she?
Sweet love is not for her! The dreaded sorcerer
Hath said she's fore-sold for a price—a murderer!
With heart of dev'lish wrath, which whoso dares to brave
To lie with her one night, therein shall find his grave.
She, to see Pascal perish at her side!
"Oh God! have pity on me now!" she cried.

So, rent with cruel agonies,
And weeping very sore,
Fell the poor child upon her knees,
Her little shrine before.

"Oh, Holy Virgin!"—sighing—"on thee alone relying,
I come; I'm all astray! Father and mother too
Are dead lang syne, and I accursed! All tongues are crying
This hideous tale! Yet save me if't be true;
If they have falsely sworn, be it on their souls borne
When I shall bring my taper on the fête-day morn *
Oh! blessed Mother, let me see
That I am not denied of thee!"

Brief prayer,
Though 'tis sincere,
To Heaven mounts quickly,
Sure to have won a gracious ear;
The maid her purpose holds, and ponders momently,
And oftentimes grows sick, and cannot speak for fear,
But sometimes taketh heart, and sudden hope and strong
Shines in her soul, as brightest meteor gleams the sky along.

* At Notre Dame de Bon Encontré, a church in the suburbs of Agen, celebrated for its legends, its miracles, and the numerous pilgrimages which are usually made to it in the month of May.

## Fourth Part.

The Fête at Notre Dame—Offering to the Virgin—Thunderstroke and Taper Extinguished—The Storm at Roquefort—Fire at Estanquet—Triumph of Pascal—Fury of Marcel—Power of a Mother—Bad Head and Good Heart—Conclusion.

At last, behold the day she longed for, yet so fearfully,
But lo! the sun rose cheerfully;
And long, long lines of white-robed village girls
From all the country round, walked tow'rds the tinkling bells,
And soon, proud Notre Dame appeared in sight,
As 'midst a cloud of perfume!
'Twas if the thirty hamlets in their might
Were piled together into one.

What priests! What candles! Crucifixes! Garlands!
What Angels,* and what banners!

You see there Artigues, Puymiral, Astafort,
Saint-Cirq, Cardonnet, Lusignan, Brax, Roquefort,
But this year, Roquefort first, o'erleapeth all.
What crowds there are of curious people,
To watch the girl sold to the Devil!
The news has travelled everywhere;
They know that she, in silent prayer,
Implores the Virgin to protect her there!

Her neighbours scoff, and her menace,
But saddened friends grieve at her sore disgrace,
Love, through their heart, in fervour rills,
Each one respects this plaintivest of girls;

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* The Angels walked in procession, and sang the Angelos at the appropriate hours.

And many a pitying soul a prayer said,
That some great miracle might yet be made
In favour of this poor and suppliant maid.

She saw, rejoiced, more hope with her abode;
Though voice of people is the voice of God!
Oh! how her heart beat as the church she neared,
'Twas for the Virgin's indulgence she cared.
Mothers with heartaches; young unfortunates;
The orphan girls; the women without mates;
All knelt before, with tapers waxen,
The image of the Virgin;
And there the aged priest, in surplice dressed,
Placed the crosses at their lips, and afterwards them blessed.

No sign of sorrow did on any suppliant fall,
But with their happy hearts, their ways went one and all,
So Franconnette grew happy too,
And most because Pascal prayed fervent in her view;
She dared t' raise her eyes to the holy father's face,
It seemed to her that love, hymns, lights, and the incense
United, cried out, "Grace!"
"Grace, grace divine," she sighed, "and love! Let them be mine!"
Then stretching out her taper lit, and followed to the shrine,
Bearing a garland in her hand; and all about her strove
To give a place to her, and bade her forward move.
They fixed their eyes upon the sacred priest and her,
And scarce a breath was drawn, and not a soul did stir;

But when the priest, holding the image of redeeming love,
Had laid it on the orphan's lips; before her kiss was given,
Burst a terrific thunderpeal, as if 'twould rend the heaven,
Blowing her taper out, and all the altar lights above.

Oh, what is this? The crashing thunder!
Her prayer denied, the lights put out!
Good God! she's sold indeed! All, all is true, no doubt,
So a long murmur rose of horror and of wonder;
For while the maiden breathlessly
Cowering like some lost soul, their shuddering glances under,
Sudden crept forth, all shrunk away, and let her pass them by.

Howbeit, that great peal was the opening blow
Of a wild storm and terrible,
That straightway upon Roquefort fell,
The spire of Saint Pierre * lay in ruins low,
And, smitten by the sharp scourge of the hail,
In all the region round, men could but weep and wail.

The angel bands who walked that day
In fair procession, hymns to sing,
Turned sorrowing, all save one, away,
*Ora pro nobis* chaunting.

Yet, in those early times, though not as now,
The angry waves to clear,
To other jealous towns could Agen show
Great bridges three, as she a royal city were;

* The ancient parish church of Roquefort, whose ruins only now remain. See text for the effects of the storm.

Then she had only barges two, by poles propelled slow,
That waited for the minstrels, to bear them to Roquefort,
Whose villagers heard rumours of the widespread woe;
Ere landing, they were ranged for singing on the shore.
At first the tale but half they heed,
But soon they see in very deed,
Vineyards and happy fields with hopeless ruin smit;
Then each let fall his banner fair,
And lamentations infinite
Rent on all sides the evening air,
Till o'er the swelling throng rose deadly clear the cry,
"And still we spare this Franconnette!" Then suddenly,
As match to powder laid, the words
"Set her on fire! That daughter of the Huguenot,
Let's burn her up, and let her ashes rot."
Then violent cries were heard.
Howls of "Ay! Ay! the wretch! Now let her meet her fate!
She is the cause of all, 'tis plain!
Once she has made us desolate,
But she shall never curse again!"

And now the crowd grew angrier, wilder too.
"Hunt her off face of earth!" one shouts anew;
"Hunt her to death! 'Tis meet," a thousand tongues repeat,
The tempest in the skies cannot with this compete.
Oh, then, to see them as they came,
With clenched fists and eyes aflame,
Hell did indeed its demons all unchain.
And while the storm recedes, the night is growing clear,

But poison shoots through every vein
Of the possess'd madmen there.

Thus goaded they themselves to crime; but where was she,
Unhappy Franconnette? To her own cottage driven—
Worshipping her one relic, sad and dreamily,
And whispered to the withered flowers Pascal had loving given:
"Dear nosegay, when I saw thee first,
Methought thy sweetness was divine,
And I did drink it, heart athirst;
But now thou art not sweet as erst,
Because those wicked thoughts of mine
Have blighted all thy beauty rare;
I'm sold to powers of ill, for Heav'n hath spurned my prayer;
My love is deadly love! No hope on earth have I!
So, treasure of my heart, flowers of the meadow fair,
Because I bless the hand that gathered thee, good-bye!
Pascal must not love such as I!
He must th' accursed maid forswear,
Who yet to God for him doth cry!
In wanton merriment last year,
Even at love laughed Franconnette;
Now is my condemnation clear,
Now whom I love, I must forget;
Sold to the demon at my birth!
My God, how can it be? Have I not faith in Thee?
Oh! blessed blossoms of the earth,
Let me drive with my cross the evil one from me!
And thou, my mother, in the star-lit skies above,
And thou, my guardian, oh! mother of our God,
Pity me: For I bless Pascal, but part from him I love!

Pity the maid accurséd, by the rod
Sore smitten, to the earth down-trod,
Help me, thy Heart Divine to move!"

"Franconnette, little one, what means thy plaintive moan?"
So spake the hoary dame. "Didst thou not smiling say
Our Lady did receive thy offering to-day?
But sure, no happy heart should make so sad a groan.
Thou hast deceived me? Some new ill," she said,
Hath fall'n upon us!" "Nay, not so; be comforted.
I—I'm quite happy!" "So my sweetest deary,
God grant that some good respite we may have,
For your sad sorrow diggeth up my grave;
And this hath been a lonesome, fearsome day, and weary;
That cruel dream of fire I had some time ago,
Howe'er I strove, did always haunt me so!
And then, thou know'st the storm; oh, I was terrified,
So that, to-night, my dear, I shudder in my fright!"

What sudden noise is this outside?
"Fire! Fire! Let's burn them in their cot!"
Flames shine through all the shutters wide,
Then Franconnette springs to the doorway tremblingly,
And, gracious Heaven! what doth she see?
By light of burning reek,
An angry people huddled thick;
She hears them shout, "Now, to your fate!
Spare ne'er the young one, nor the old,
Both work us ruin manifold.
Sold to the demon, we must burn you straight!"

The girl fell on her knees, before the face
Of that most furious populace.

She cried, "Grandmother will you kill? Oh, pity, grace!"
'Twas of no use, the wretches, blind with fury,
In viewing her barcheaded, in their hurry,
Saw but a cursed leman,
Sold bodily to the demon.
The fiercest cried "Avaunt!"
While the more savage forward spring,
And on the door their feet they plant,
With fiery brand in their hand brandishing.

"Hold! I implore you!" cried a voice, before unheard;
And sudden leapt before the crowd like lightning with the word,
A man of stately strength and tall,
It was the noble, brave Pascal!

"Cowards!" he cried. "What? Will you murder women then,
And burn their cot? Children of God! Are you the same?
Tigers you are, and cannot then be men;
And after all that they have suffered! Shame!
Fall back! Fall back! I say; the walls are growing hot!"

"Then let her leave us quite, this wretched Huguenot,
For she was long since by the devil bought,
God smites us 'cause we did not drive her forth before."
"Quick! quick!" cried Pascal, "living they will burn!
Ye dogs, who moved ye to this awful crime?"
"'Twas Marcel," they replied. "See, now he comes in time!"
"You lie!" the soldier thundered in his turn;
"I love her, boaster, more than thou!"

Said Pascal, "How wilt prove thy love, thou of the tender heart?"
"I come," the other said, "to save her. I come to take her part.
I come, if so she will, to wed her, even now."

"And so am I," replied Pascal, and steadfastly
Before his rival's eyes, as bound by some great spell.
Then to the orphan girl turned he,
With worship all unspeakable.
"Answer me, Franconnette, and speak the truth alone;
Thou'st followed by the wicked with spite and scorn, my own;
But we two love thee well, and ready are to brave
Death! Yes, or hell, thy precious life to save.
Choose which of us thou wilt!" "Nay," she lamented sore,
"Dearest, mine is a love that slays!
Be happy, then, without me! Forget me! Go thy ways!"

"Happy without thee, dear! That can I never more:
Nay, were it true, as lying rumour says,
An evil spirit ruled you o'er,
I'd rather die with you, than live bereaved days!"

When life is at its bitterest,
The voice of love aye rules us best;
Instantly rose the girl above her mortal dread,
And on the crowd advancing straight,
"Because I love Pascal, alone I'd meet my fate!
Howbeit his will is law," she said,
"Wherefore together let our souls be sped:"
Then was Pascal in heav'n, and Marcel in the dust laid low;
Then Pascal sought his gallant rival, saying,

"I am more blest than thou! Forgive! thou'rt brave,
I know,
Some squire* should follow me to death; then wilt thou
not
Serve me? I have no other friend!" Marcel seemed
dreaming;
And now he scowled with wrath, and now his eyes
were kindling;
Terrible was the battle in his mind;
Till his eye fell on Franconnette, serene and beaming,
But with no word for *him;* then pale, but smilingly,
"Because it is her will," he said, "I follow thee."

Two weeks had passed away, and a strange nuptial
train,
Adown the verdant hill went slowly to the plain;
First came the comely pair we know, in all their
bloom,
While gathered far and wide, three deep on either side,
The ever-curious rustics hied,
Shudd'ring at heart o'er Pascal's doom.
Marcel conducts their march, but pleasures kindly true,
Glows not upon th' unmoving face he lifts to view.
And something glances from his eye,
That makes men shudder as they pass him by;

* *Dounzel* is the word used by Jasmin. Miss H. W. Preston says of this passage: "There is something essentially knightly in Pascal's cast of character, and it is singular that, at the supreme crisis of his fate, he assumes, as if unconsciously, the very phraseology of chivalry. 'Some squire (dounzel) should follow me to death,' &c., and we find it altogether natural and burning in the high-hearted smith. There are many places where Jasmin addresses his hearers directly as 'Messieurs,' where the context also makes it evident that the word is emphatic, that he is distinctly conscious of addressing those who are above him in rank, and that the proper translation is 'gentles,' or even 'masters'; yet no poet ever lived who was less of a sycophant."

Yet verily his mien triumphant is, at least
Sole master is he of this feast,
And gives his rival, for bouquet,
A supper and a ball to-day.
But at the dance and at the board
Alike, scarce one essayed a word;
None sung a song, none raised a jest,
For dark forebodings everyone oppressed.

And the betrothed, by love's deep rapture fascinated,
Silent and sweet, though near the fate she sad awaited,
No sound their dream dispelled, yet hand in hand did press,
Their eyes looked ever in a visioned happiness;
And so, at last, the evening fell.
But one affrighted woman straightway broke the spell;
She fell on Pascal's neck and "Fly, my son!" she cried.
"I from the Sorcerer come! Fly, fly from thy false bride
The fatal sieve* hath turned; thy death decree is spoken!
There's sulphur fume in bridal room, and by the same dread token,
Enter it not; for if thou liv'st thou'rt lost," she sadly said;
"And what were life to me, my son, if thou wert dead?"
Then Pascal felt his eyes were wet,
And turned away, striving to hide his face, whereon
The mother shrieked, "Ingrate! but I will save thee yet.

* *Lou sedas* (the sieve) is made of raw silk, and is used for sifting flour. It has also a singular use in necromancy. When one desires to know the name of the doer of an act—a theft for instance—the sieve is made to revolve, but woe to him whose name is spoken just as the sieve stops!

Thou wilt not dare!"—falling before her stricken son.
"Thou shalt now o'er my body pass, even as thou goest forth!
A wife, it seems, is all; and mother nothing worth!
Unhappy that I am!" The crowd alas! their heavy tears ran down!

"Marcel," the bridegroom said, "her grief is my despair;
But love, thou knowest, 's stronger yet; indeed 'tis time to go!
Only, should I perish, let my mother be thy care."

"I can no more," cried Marcel, "thy mother's conquered here."
And then the valiant soldier from his eyelids brushed a tear.
"Take courage, Pascal, friend of mine
Thy Franconnette is good and pure.
That hideous tale was told, of dark design;
But give thy mother thanks; but for her coming, sure
This night might yet have seen my death and thine."
"What say'st thou?" "Hush! now I will tell thee all;
Thou knowest that I lov'd this maid, Pascal.
For her, like thee, I would have shed my blood;
I dreamt that I was loved again; she held me in her thrall.
Albeit my prayer was aye withstood;
Her elders promised her to me;
And so, when other suitors barr'd my way, in spite,
Saying, in love or war, one may use strategy,
I gave the wizard gold, my rival to affright,
Therefore, my chance did everything, insomuch that I said,
My treasure is already won and made.

But when, in the same breath, we two our suit made known,
And when I saw her, without turn of head,
Choose thee, to my despair, it was not to be borne.
And then I vow'd her death and thine, before the morrow morn!
I thought to lead you forth to the bridal bower ere long,
And then, the bed beside which I had mined with care,
That they might say no prince or power of th' air
Is here. That I might burn you for my wrong;
Ay, cross yourselves, thought I, for you shall surely die!
But thy mother, with her tears, has made my vengeance fly.
I thought of my own, Pascal, who died so long ago.
Care thou for thine! And now fear nought from me, I trow,
Eden is coming down to earth for thee, no doubt,
But I, whom henceforth men can only hate and flout,
Will to the wars away! For in me something saith
I may recover from my rout,
Better than by a crime! Ay! by a soldier's death!"

Thus saying, Marcel vanished, loudly cheered on every side;
And then with deepening blushes the twain each other eyed,
For now the morning stars in the dark heavens shone;
But now I lift my pencil suddenly.
Colours for strife and pain have I,
But for such perfect rapture—none!

And so the morning came, with softly-dawning light,
No sound, no stir as yet within the cottage white,
At Estanquet the people of the hamlets gathered were,
To wait the waking of the happy married pair.

Marcel had frankly told th' unhappy truth; Nathless,
The devil had an awful power,
And ignorance was still his dower.
Some feared for bride and bridegroom yet; and guess
At strange mischance. "In the night cries were heard,"
Others had seen some shadows on the wall, in wondrous ways.
Lives Pascal yet? None dares to dress
The spicy broth,* to leave beside the nuptial door;
And so another hour goes o'er.
Then floats a lovely strain of music overhead,
A sweet refrain oft heard before,
'Tis the *aoubado*† offered to the newly-wed.

So the door opes at last, and the young pair was seen,
She blushed before the folk, but friendly hand and mien,
The fragments of her garter gives,
And every woman two receives;
Then winks and words of ruth from eye and lip are passed,
And luck of proud Pascal makes envious all at last,
For the poor lads, whose hearts are healed but slightly,
Of their first fervent pain,
When they see Franconnette, blossoming rose-light brightly,
All dewy fresh, so sweet and sightly,
They cry aloud, "We'll ne'er believe a Sorcerer again!"

* An ancient practice. *Lou Tourrin noubial*, a highly-spiced onion soup, was carried by the wedding guests to the bridegroom at a late hour of the night.

† The *aoubado*—a song of early morning, corresponding to the serenade or evening song.

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